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THE KRA CANAL: AN ANALYSIS OF A  
FOREIGN POLICY ALTERNATIVE FOR THE  
UNITED STATES NAVY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Alan Stevens Graham



# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



# THESIS

THE KRA CANAL: AN ANALYSIS OF A  
FOREIGN POLICY ALTERNATIVE FOR THE  
UNITED STATES NAVY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

by

Alan Stevens Graham

March 1975

Thesis Advisor:

Boyd Huff

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T167552





REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) The Kra Canal: An Analysis of a Foreign Policy Alternative for the United States Navy in the Indian Ocean		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Master's Thesis March 1975
7. AUTHOR(s) Alan Stevens Graham		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93940		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93940		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California 93940		12. REPORT DATE March 1975
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 154
		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Thailand's Isthmus of Kra connects the Malay Peninsula with southern Thailand and Burma. Sixty miles in width at its narrowest point, the Kra Isthmus, over time, has been proposed as a site for the location of a canal connecting the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean. The impact that a completed Kra Canal would have on U.S. Naval policy in the Indian Ocean, in support		



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The Kra Canal: An Analysis of a Foreign Policy  
Alternative for the United States Navy in the Indian Ocean

by

Alan Stevens Graham  
Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy  
B.A., University of New Mexico, 1968

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NAVAL INTELLIGENCE

from the  
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
March 1975





## ABSTRACT

Thailand's Isthmus of Kra connects the Malay Peninsula with southern Thailand and Burma. Sixty miles in width at its narrowest point, the Kra Isthmus, over time, has been proposed as a site for the location of a canal connecting the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean. The impact that a completed Kra Canal would have on U.S. Naval policy in the Indian Ocean, in support of specific national interests, was analyzed with respect to the advantages and costs that would result from U.S. participation in the construction and operation of the canal. The minimal advantages offered by the canal over the existing passages through the Malay Peninsula-Indonesian Archipelago Barrier are outweighed by the costs that accrue from U.S. support of the canal, such that it is impractical and unnecessary for the United States to pursue this foreign policy in support of U.S. national interests within the Indian Ocean.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Isthmus of Kra separates the Gulf of Siam and the Bay of Bengal, extending southward from the southernmost confluence of the Thailand and Burma borders to join together with the Malay Peninsula. The Malay Peninsula is at its narrowest at the Kra Isthmus, and for centuries this has been proposed as a site for a canal connecting the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean. In 1972 the canal issue received substantial attention, not only from Southeast Asian nations, but also from non-area interested parties. The effect that the Kra Canal would have on U.S. Naval policy in the Indian Ocean in support of United States national interests will be the subject of this thesis.

### A. FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL INTERESTS

Within the broad concept of foreign policy--bounded by the constraints imposed by its own perception of national interest--United States foreign policy directs American actions so that specific foreign policy objectives might be achieved in support of these national interests. As international political dynamics alter the perspectives of national interests, foreign policy planners must make necessary adjustments to



maintain consistency between national interests and foreign policy. The dynamics of the military and political environment within the Indian Ocean since the Second World War have changed the American perception of its national interests in this area, and have brought about a concomitant reappraisal of American foreign policy.

Given the context of specific national interests and foreign policy objectives within the Indian Ocean, a series of detailed alternative plans to achieve these objectives can be prepared in order to provide a series of choices of action from which to determine the most appropriate response in the presence of the international and domestic environments. These alternative programs to achieve foreign policy objectives in specific areas must not of themselves neglect the whole of American foreign policy, nor the specific environment within which they are to be implemented. Rather, they must carefully balance the relative importance of the national interest objectives in this specific area with worldwide national security objectives. Moreover, national interest gains from the implementation of the foreign policy must include the credit or debit of the international community in general, and the Indian Ocean in particular, which would accrue from the specific foreign policy.





American foreign policy since 1971 has vaguely attempted to adhere to the tenets of the Nixon Doctrine. Although no longer in a position himself to direct foreign policy, the former President's State Department bureaucracy remains intact, and there is no reason to believe that the Nixon Doctrine is not still applicable.

"Current U. S. policy in Asia is based on the Nixon Doctrine which is generally thought to counsel limited American involvement, indirect security support for friendly countries, reduced bilateral economic assistance commitments and a 'stand down, stand back' local posture."<sup>1</sup>

This paper will present a Nixon Doctrine approach to American national interests in the Indian Ocean, and will offer a specific foreign policy alternative in support of those national interests. This thesis will examine the proposed canal through Thailand's Isthmus of Kra. United States support for the canal could provide some benefits in terms of commercial shipping between-port transit times, and a more responsive access route for military units between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. At the same time, however, a certain number of liabilities from such U.S. support of the canal would be incurred, which might overshadow the benefits that would accrue from the canal's

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<sup>1</sup>Wayne Wilcox, The Emergence of Bangladesh (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1973), p. 2.



completion. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the benefits and liabilities of a U.S.-supported Kra Canal in order to determine the application of a naval policy involving the Kra Canal to support United States national interests in the Indian Ocean.

Owing to the complexities of the political, economic, and military environments within the Indian Ocean, and the limited scope of this paper's hypothesis, it will be necessary to assume specific national interests in the Indian Ocean area. This paper will be an area study of limited scope: the area of concentration will not be that area which is of ultimate concern, but rather the specific area which is directly concerned with the hypothesis under study. The assumptions of national interest represent a general consensus of the bibliographical material. They do not presume to describe existing national interest objectives, nor normatively predict what those national interests should be. Rather, they represent potential objectives which at some time may be present.

#### B. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Indian Ocean prior to 1947 was basically a British area of influence and control. However, the staggering military and economic losses sustained by Great Britain during World War Two, coupled with the growing worldwide tide against the policies of colonialism, resulted in the independence of India and Pakistan,



and a general lessening of Britain's foreign policy "east of Suez." As the British reduced their military strength and political control within the Indian Ocean, to an almost complete withdrawal in 1971, the littoral of the Indian Ocean saw themselves as filling the power vacuum evacuated by the British. The naval strength of the littoral states was extremely weak. Indeed, even were they to form an alliance and unite their naval forces, they would not comprise anything more than a limited coastal defense force. The littoral states recognized their military weaknesses, and could accurately foresee the consequences if a major naval power were to establish itself in the British Indian Ocean vacuum.

The United States emerged from the Second World War with an expanded view of national interests and a foreign policy that would assume global proportions. National interests, as perceived by the United States, would include the Indian Ocean and its littoral. Worldwide priorities kept national interests and foreign policy within the Indian Ocean at a low level in the immediate post-war years; the United States did not immediately replace the gradually withdrawing British naval forces. American perceptions of national interests were potentially challenged by the introduction of a Soviet Naval detachment into the Indian Ocean on 22 March 1968. The size and





duration of the Soviet deployments into the area have increased following the initial deployment.

American foreign policy makers had to assay this potential threat to United States national interests and project a response commensurate with the perceived gravity of the threat to its national interests, while accommodating if possible the political attitudes of the Indian Ocean littoral.

Although the problem as broadly defined concerns United States national interests within the Indian Ocean, and the perceived threats to these interests, the more specific problem to be addressed by this study relates to naval objectives within the Indian Ocean as directed by foreign policy in support of national interests. If the national interests can be assumed and held constant, then the specific tactics employed by the United States to achieve the national interest objectives would be exposed and subject to analysis.

### C. HYPOTHESIS

The United States Navy can effectively pursue American national interests and support American foreign policy within the Indian Ocean without stationing a major task force, nor acquiring a major operating base in the area. Naval resources required to effect United States naval policy would be drawn from the Seventh Fleet. The United States should actively





support Thailand in the planning and construction of a canal across the Kra Isthmus. This canal could provide Seventh Fleet naval units with a geographically strategic point-of-entry into the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean and could facilitate logistical support of naval units operating in the Indian Ocean.

Specifically, the hypothesis that this paper will evaluate is: The United States should support the construction of the proposed Kra Canal so that Seventh Fleet naval units could rapidly respond to political-military activities within the Indian Ocean, in support of American national interests, as an alternative to stationing a major task force, or acquiring a major operating base within the area.



## II. THE KRA CANAL

Ocean access to the eastern Indian Ocean must pass through the geographic barrier of the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago, or bypass this barrier to the south, by routes either north or south of Australia. Alternatives to these existing access routes would have to be dug through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier. The impetus for such an undertaking would come from a desire to have a shorter, more expeditious access to the Indian Ocean, or, by the closing of the existing accesses to all or certain categories of vessels.

The Kra Canal, a proposed canal across Thailand's Kra Isthmus, is one potential alternative ocean access to the eastern Indian Ocean. If constructed, the canal would reduce the distance between the Gulf of Siam and the Indian Ocean. It is the hypothesis of this thesis that a completed Kra Canal would provide a rapid access capability to the Indian Ocean for United States Seventh Fleet units, rather than stationing a permanent task force, or acquiring a major operating base, within the Indian Ocean.

The construction of the Kra Canal is deeply involved in the international relations character of Southeast Asia, and extends outward to include nearly every country with ocean-oriented



interests in this area. The geography of the Indonesia-Malay Barrier is a constricting element on the choices for a location of a canal. Furthermore, the foreign policies of the nations involved will influence the nature of the existing passages through the barrier, as well as proposed new passages. The Kra Isthmus Canal has long-established historical roots, and, although never constructed, has on many occasions progressed to the initial planning phases. The Kra Canal would have a varied impact on transits through the Barrier, depending upon the political circumstances of the time.

Construction of the canal is inevitably tied up in the political structure of Thailand. It will be necessary to review the current political relationships between the United States and Thailand in order to understand the potential for United States support of a canal through the Isthmus of Kra.

#### A. THE GEOGRAPHIC BARRIER

The arm of the Malay Peninsula extending south from Thailand and Burma is met by the expansive Indonesia Archipelago, limiting ocean access to the Indian Ocean through the land mass. Three major ocean access routes are used to gain entry into the Ocean. Most prominent of these is the combined Singapore Strait and the Malacca Strait, collectively termed Malacca Straits.





Each of the access routes through the Barrier, and the Kra Canal, are narrow in width and extremely shallow. It is recognized that in the event one nation or alliance of nations determine it necessary to interdict ocean travel through the Barrier, it can be easily accomplished with only limited military technology and naval assets. As only three natural breaks exist in the Barrier, with the remote possibility of a fourth in the Kra Canal, it is likely that during a time of armed conflict or an intense crisis involving naval transits through the Barrier, all of the ocean routes can be easily sealed. With this in mind, the trans-Barrier passages will be examined in the context of an environment short of overt aggression against the passages, which would render any Barrier transit impossible.

#### 1. The Straits of Malacca

The Malacca Strait is approximately 500 miles in length, separating the Malay Peninsula from the Indonesian Island of Sumatra. Singapore Strait is sixty miles long. The width of the western section of the Malacca Straits is about ten miles; the eastern end is about twenty miles in width. At their narrowest, the Straits are two and one-half miles wide. The depth for navigational purposes is twelve fathoms, or about 72 feet. Scattered along its length are numerous shoals, complicating the navigational process. Coupled with the





precision navigation requirements is the growing problem of traffic density. In 1970 it was reported that 37,000 ships passed through the Straits, an increase of 5,000 over the previous year.<sup>2</sup> Not only has traffic volume increased, but also the size of transiting ships has increased. The emphasis of Middle East crude oil transported eastward from the Persian Gulf has given a dramatic rise in the number of supertankers, dangerously approaching the limiting navigational draft, transiting the Straits.

That the Malacca Straits shipping route between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean is 800 miles shorter than the next closest strait supports the prominence of the Malacca Straits. Commercially, it is financially advantageous to minimize between-port transit time, and as more commercial vessels operate between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the volume of traffic using the Straits will increase.

The Malacca Straits also provide transiting naval units with a tactically more advantageous access across the Barrier than either of the two more lengthy routes. Not only does this apply to the United States Seventh Fleet naval units, but

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<sup>2</sup>Captain Edward F. Oliver, U.S. Coast Guard, "Malacca: Dire Straits," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, June, 1973, p. 30.



also to the Pacific Fleet units of the Soviet Union based at Vladivostok. Both navies use these Straits to support their naval interests in the Indian Ocean. The Malacca Straits, however, are extremely vulnerable to shipping interdiction measures, owing to their narrow width and shallow depth. In a time of crisis either of the great powers could easily seal off this passage. Moreover, a third party, with unsophisticated technology and limited naval assets could also block ocean traffic through the Straits.

## 2. Sunda Strait

A second passage through the Barrier is located at the southeastern tip of Sumatra. The Sunda Strait is 450 miles south of the Malacca Straits, and is approximately 800 miles longer in transit length from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean. Unlike the Malacca Straits, Indonesia occupies both sides of the Sunda Strait. This passage is quite narrow and short in length. It does not have the traffic flow as does Malacca.

## 3. Lombok Strait

The Lombok Strait is 600 miles east of the Sunda Strait. It too passes through islands of the Indonesian Archipelago. The Strait is navigationally wider than either the Malacca or Sunda Straits. However, the Lombok Strait adds an additional one thousand miles to the transit distance to the South China



Sea-Indian Ocean route. Because of the wider navigational width of this Strait, the very large petroleum-carrying supertankers of 300,000 tons or more use this route instead of the more shallow Malacca Straits or the narrow Sunda Straits. Of the three natural passages through the barrier, the Lombok Strait is the most easily navigatable, with the major disadvantage being the excessive transit distance involved.

#### 4. The Australian Passages

Alternative access to the eastern Indian Ocean, other than through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier, must necessarily pass either north or south of Australia. This routing of vessels transiting from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean is extremely lengthy. However, for vessels allied on the side of Australia, logistic and maintenance support bases can be utilized, on the northern shore at Darwin, or Melbourne in the south and Fremantle and Perth to the west. The support facilities notwithstanding, the transit routes around Indonesia, north of Australia, are of such excessive length as to render them impractical and unnecessary, unless all other access routes to the eastern Indian Ocean are closed.

#### B. THE POLITICAL BARRIER

The three Straits through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier have recently become important with respect to international free-passage and territorial waters. If it is determined that the





Straits are within territorial waters of Indonesia and Malaysia, a political barrier through the archipelago and Malay Peninsula could be erected. Restricted passage to commercial merchant shipping and military units would have a significant impact in the international community.

In November, 1971, the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia announced that the Strait of Malacca, separating those two countries, would thereafter be considered territorial waters. At its narrowest width the Malacca Strait extends 24 miles between Malaysia and Indonesia. In claiming that their territorial waters extend twelve miles from their coastline, a joint agreement by both countries to claim half of the Strait as territorial waters would enable them to collectively control the Strait. It was announced by both nations that the Strait would be closed to all "outsized tankers above 200,000 dead-weight tons and to all warships of any tonage which had not made application for, and received permission to, transit the Strait of Malacca."<sup>3</sup>

Several self-centered underlying reasons exist which support the joint Indonesia-Malaysia claims. First, the Strait is not deep enough to accommodate the supertankers of 200,000 tons or

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<sup>3</sup>Lawrence Griswold, "Bypassing Malacca," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, June, 1973, p. 106.





more. Several tankers have already run aground, and the danger of widespread oil pollution is real. Moreover, ships of the supertanker size have sluggish maneuvering capabilities, which is extremely dangerous in the narrow confines of the channel, especially when considering the volume of traffic running through it. Second, Indonesia and Malaysia are concerned about their national security. "For some time Indonesian leaders have warily watched the expansion of Soviet Naval power in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean."<sup>4</sup> The Soviet Naval units in the Indian Ocean usually come from their Pacific Squadron, through the Malacca Straits. After 1971, with United States Naval activity increasing in the Indian Ocean, both great powers were using the Straits for military purposes. Indonesia feared the presence of great power navies within the inner line of their defense.

At present, the political Barrier is penetratable. Super-tankers which do not exceed limiting navigational drafts transit the Straits. United States and Soviet warships freely use the Straits to gain access to the Indian Ocean. However, Indonesia and Malaysia have assumed a position that could place the Malacca Straits within territorial waters. Under International

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<sup>4</sup>S. Iskandar, "Malaysia and Indonesia, A Family Affair," Far Eastern Economic Review, 15 April 1972, p. 18.



Law, territorial waters limits access through the waterway to innocent passage, the definition of which rests with the nation or nations claiming territorial coverage of the waterway. The joint claim of territorial waters status for the Malacca Straits, with the inherent right under International Law for these nations to permit innocent passage, would enable Indonesia and Malaysia to determine national security threats posed by the various categories of surface warships. In effect, Indonesia or Malaysia could prohibit the transit of warships through the Malacca Straits under territorial waters status, if either recognizes a potential security threat. In addition to the Malacca Straits, Indonesia has claimed internal waters status for the Sunda and Lombok Straits, which under international agreement precludes the right of innocent passage.

These Indonesian and Malaysian claims to the international status of the three major access routes through their combined geographical barrier are the basis for speculative concern. Whether legal or illegal under International Law, whether enforced or unenforced, the assertions by these Barrier countries have served notice to the world that there exists the possibility of the imposition of limitations on vessels transiting the Straits. The consequences of these limitations could be damaging to the nations dependent on trade through the Barrier, as well as



to those nations concerned with the naval activity within the Indian Ocean.

A further consideration must be noted: the traditional policy of China to exclude outsiders from forming alliances or establishing bases in Southeast Asian nations. If China were eventually able to influence the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia, it is possible that China would restrict, at the least, naval activity, if not merchant shipping, through the Barrier. As China increases its naval strength and national prestige in the international community, the potential for Chinese dominance in Southeast Asia increases apace.

The political barrier is not recognized by either the United States or the Soviet Union. The United States Navy's interest in maintaining the international character of the Strait was set forth clearly in April, 1972, when Admiral Thomas L. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated: "We should have and must have the freedom to go through, under, and over the Malacca Strait."<sup>5</sup> The Soviet Union has repeatedly declared the Straits open for passage of all merchant and naval shipping.

In consideration of the international legal viewpoint on the status of the Sunda and Lombok Straits, the majority of the

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<sup>5</sup>Oliver, op. cit., p. 29.





international community does not recognize "internal waters" status of the Straits; nor do they recognize the limited "territorial waters" status of the Malacca Straits. The United States has assumed the position that the Malacca Straits represent a strategic and traditional access route to the Indian Ocean. Territorial waters status of these Straits with the innocent passage constraints would handcuff United States nautical interests through the Straits.

## C. THE KRA CANAL

### 1. Background

The Indonesia-Malay Barrier between the Gulf of Siam and the Indian Ocean remains an obstacle to shipping traffic. When sailing vessels plied the trade-routes across the globe, merchants were forever looking for shorter and more expedient routes. One especially important trade relationship existed between Europe and the colonial empires in South and Southeast Asia, and beyond to China and Japan. The Suez Canal, constructed in the middle decades of the 1800's, significantly reduced the distance to the Asian empires. That the Suez Canal was constructed gave proof that nineteenth century technology would support canal construction where feasible. The sixty mile width of the Isthmus of Kra offered the only area along the Barrier where a canal could realistically be carved. It is logical,





therefore, to understand the early exploration of the Isthmus of Kra as a potential site for a canal through the Barrier.

Surveys were conducted along the Isthmus during the nineteenth century. The British examined the area in mid-century, and determined a canal was feasible. However, political and economic complications intervened. First, the Isthmus belonged to the Kingdom of Siam--the only nation in Southeast Asia to remain free from European colonialism. In order for the canal to be constructed, Siam would have to be an approving party. Furthermore, the canal would by-pass the Malacca Straits and the British colony of Singapore. Singapore's economy was heavily dependent upon the merchant vessels using the colony as a logistic and maintenance base. These restraints will have recurrent appearances in the history of the Kra Canal.

The French became interested in the canal during the latter portion of the nineteenth century when they were establishing their French-Indochina colonial empire. French interest in the canal received a reaction from Great Britain, who wanted to ensure the importance of Singapore along the Malacca route. The Siamese King, however, did not acquiesce to pressure from either France or Great Britain, and neither was granted canal rights. During this time frame, Ferdinand de Lesseps, of Suez and Panama Canal fame, "figured prominently in one of the most



important projections for connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea across the Isthmus of Kra."<sup>6</sup>

The concept of the Kra Canal reappeared at various times through the early 1900's. The French and British were co-dominant parties in the beginning, but French interest fell considerably by the turn of the century. Britain indicated an occasional interest, but the impact of a Kra Canal on Singapore inhibited any real consideration of the canal. Following World War Two, the British "imposed upon the Siamese Government a clause in a formal agreement in 1946 wherein the Siamese agreed not to cut any canal across the territory of Siam to connect the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Siam without first obtaining the consent of the Government of the Kingdom."<sup>7</sup> Writing in a paper on the history of the Kra Canal, Professor Herbert B. Smith of Pomona College reported that the British rescinded this restriction in the 1960's.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Present Status of the Canal

Early in July 1972, the ruling National Executive Council in Thailand approved tentative plans for the construction

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<sup>6</sup>Herbert B. Smith, "Historic Proposals for a Kra Canal: Their Impact on International Relations in Southeast Asia," (paper presented to 1974 Annual Meeting of Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast (ASPAC '74), San Diego, California, June 14-16, 1974), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.



of a canal across the Isthmus of Kra. The revival of the Kra Canal issue was initiated by the now-defunct Council without the participation of other countries. As reported in the July 16, 1972 New York Times, the canal was to be approximately 120 yards wide, with five navigational locks.<sup>9</sup> The proposed canal was to run about 95 miles, from a bay in Phangnga province on the west coast of the Isthmus to another bay in Surat-Thani province on the Gulf of Siam.<sup>10</sup> The original proposal called for a maximum navigational draft of 90 feet, accommodating vessels up to 100,000 deadweight tons.

In December, 1972, the Royal Thai government contracted with two American firms to conduct feasibility studies of a canal across the Kra Isthmus. The contractors were Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton of New York, and LTV of Dallas, Texas.<sup>11</sup> Various possible routes were studied along the Isthmus, with the most attractive route between Krabi on the west and Surat-Thani on the east coast. It was proposed that the canal should be approximately 100 feet below sea-level, "and about a quarter

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<sup>9</sup>"Thailand Plans Canal Across Kra Isthmus," New York Times, 16 July 1972, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup>Michael Hornsby, "The Ill-fated Plan to Link Two Oceans," London Times, 3 August 1972, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup>Griswold, op. cit., p. 105.





of a mile in width--enough room for two one-million-ton tankers to pass abreast, with a concrete-surfaced island between the ship lanes, and with parallel trans-isthmian roads on both sides."<sup>12</sup> The Wall Street Journal reported in December, 1973, that the canal would cost as much as eight billion dollars, with a construction time of up to ten years.<sup>13</sup>

Preliminary arrangements for the Kra Canal were serious enough, and it appeared the canal project would move earnestly towards reality. However, history seemed to catch up with the canal efforts. "Unexpected events continue to intrude, and the energy crisis of 1973-74 and the Thai political upheavals of October, 1973, have inevitably posed new question marks regarding the possibilities for actual construction of the canal."<sup>14</sup> Today the Kra Canal is once again a dormant issue. "The present government has so many serious and urgent problems, says a man close to the Kra Canal project, I doubt if they'll have time to schedule this."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>"Plans to Cut a Canal Across Thailand Appear Shelved Until Late Next Year," Wall Street Journal, 31 December 1973, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>"Plans to Cut a Canal Across Thailand Appear Shelved Until Late Next Year," Wall Street Journal, 31 December 1973, p. 1.





### 3. Motivating Factors for the Kra Canal

The impetus for the construction of the Kra Canal in the sailing-ship days was provided by the desire to reduce transit time and distance between the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. This motivating purpose prevails today, but the complexities of the international economic and political environments have added new dimensions to the situation.

Renewed interest in the Kra Canal by Thailand was led by K. Y. Chow, a Chinese-born Thai.

"In Thailand, 'K.Y.' represents the industrial energy, the wealth and power which, in the United States, might be expressed by Rockefeller or Ford. Chow and his supporters felt that such a canal was 'urgently necessary in November, 1971, when Malaysia and Indonesia announced that the Strait of Malacca, separating those two nations, would henceforth be considered territorial waters'."16

The Indonesia-Malaysia decision to limit the passage of supertankers and warships through the Strait has alarming implications. Japan is the world's biggest importer of crude oil, with an annual consumption running at about 200 million tons. This is expected to rise to 500 million by 1980, and 700 million by 1985. Japan imports 90 percent of its crude oil from the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> In order that the oil can be transported

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<sup>16</sup>C.L. Sulzberger, "A Big New Dream in Asia," New York Times, 31 December 1972, IV, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup>Hornsby, loc. cit.



more economically and quickly, the "supertanker" was constructed. The only alternative route to the Malacca Straits are the Sunda and Lombok Straits, adding at least five extra transit days and considerable cost to the voyage. The Kra Canal, as planned, would not only offer an acceptable alternative to the Malacca Straits, but also reduce transit times and shipping costs through the Barrier.

While Japan would be most affected by a limitation on the size of ships transiting the Straits, Japan favors the construction of a pipeline across the Kra Isthmus, where oil would be pumped across, rather than shipped through, the Kra Isthmus. Nevertheless, "The general feeling among Japanese oil men and tanker operators is that the pipeline will not become overwhelmingly attractive for them unless the Malaysians and Indonesians carry out their threat to restrict passage through the Malacca Strait."<sup>18</sup>

Even though Japan is not a strong proponent of the Kra Canal, a completed canal, large enough to accommodate the supertankers of 500,000 ton size, would be to Japan's advantage.

Japan, as the party most dependent on innocent passage through the Barrier, could financially support the canal's construction. Nevertheless, Japan is now receiving the majority

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



of its vital crude oil from the Middle East by supertankers of 300,000 deadweight tons, through the Lombok Strait. The Kra Canal would not substantially increase the import of crude oil owing to the existing size of the supertanker fleet. Economic reasons alone do not strongly infer that the Kra Canal is necessary or remunerative.

Motivation for the Kra Canal project was primarily economic, as demonstrated by the Thai National Executive Council's decision to survey the Isthmus for a possible canal following the Indonesia-Malaysia agreement on the Malacca Straits. However, the Kra Canal has an inherent military potential as well, although the potential has not yet been realized. If the canal were to be constructed, it would almost have to have financial and technological support from a highly-developed, industrialized nation. The most likely candidates would be the Soviet Union and the United States. It logically follows that if either of these great powers provides assistance to Thailand in the construction of the canal, they would receive in return certain privileges, perhaps economic or military, or both.

A potential scenario having the Straits of Malacca closed to the passage of warships, and a Kra Canal open to one of the great powers, but not the other, would give to that power having access to the canal a decisive tactical advantage for passage through the Barrier. While this scenario is highly





speculative, it is nevertheless a possibility and cannot be overlooked if the Kra Canal issue is once again revived.

#### 4. Construction

The Kra Canal as proposed would be a mammoth project, present day technology notwithstanding. Excavation of the canal by conventional measures might be prohibitively expensive, even by the great powers. The alternative to conventional technology is nuclear. When Dr. Edward Teller conceived the idea of a nuclear fissionable device, he had in mind peaceful uses of nuclear fission, such as the excavation of harbors or canals. In his support for the canal, K. Y Chow envisioned the use of nuclear blasting to save time and money. "He argues that precedents for such peaceful use of thermonuclear power appear to exist not only in the United States 'Plowshare' testing program, but in reports of a vast project said to be underway in the Soviet Union."<sup>19</sup>

It is conceivable that nuclear blasting could be effectively used in the construction of the canal, with considerable savings of time and expense. It is doubtful that conventional construction of the canal would be financially feasible. This would limit the number of possible countries to assist in the construction of the canal to those with a nuclear capability,

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<sup>19</sup>Sulzberger, loc. cit.



and, more specifically, to those countries who have refined the state-of-the-art to a high level. At present, only the Soviet Union and the United States have the potential to undertake this type of nuclear excavation.

## 5. Summary

The Kra Canal has a long history of surveys and projections, but action no further than the initial planning stages. It is readily evident from the geography of Southeast Asia that the Kra Isthmus is the only conceivable location for a man-made access through the Indonesia-Malay Peninsula Barrier. A completed canal could have economic, political and military ramifications, not only for the Southeast Asian nations, but also for all countries whose merchant and naval vessels operate in the area.

Construction of the Kra Canal faces economic and technological challenges. An estimated cost of eight billion dollars, and construction time of approximately ten years, is constantly threatened by rising worldwide inflation and escalating prices. Additionally, nuclear construction techniques, while saving substantial construction time, have not been approved by the world community. It is doubtful that nuclear excavation methods would be countenanced by the international environment. By reverting to conventional means of construction, an inordinate amount of construction time would be involved.



If the Kra Canal were to be constructed, it would almost certainly have to have technological and financial support from one of the great powers. In a quid-pro-quo arrangement, that power which assists Thailand in the construction of the canal would most likely gain access rights to the canal, and because of its potential military application, would probably have partial or complete operational control of the canal.

Renewed and serious interest in the Kra Canal, either by Thailand or other nations; motivated by economic or military considerations, will have an impact on the naval policies with respect to passage through the Barrier. That a non-U.S. supported Kra Canal could be detrimental to United States security interests within the Indian Ocean must be considered if the issue again surfaces. Furthermore, a U.S.-supported canal could threaten Soviet interests in the area by creating a tactical imbalance, if Soviet Naval units were prohibited from using the canal. The international implications of a completed Kra Canal are considerable; a fourth passage through the Barrier will save transit time and money, while straining international relations of all nations affected.

#### D. THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND

The only feasible location for a canal through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier is across the Isthmus of Kra. The construction





of a canal, sponsored totally by Thailand with the assistance of private financing, or by a technologically and financially capable nation or group of nations, must ultimately have the support of Thailand. If the proposed Kra Canal were to be built with United States assistance, the political climate in Thailand would have to be accommodating to the policies and objectives of the United States. The past relationships between Thailand and the United States notwithstanding, the current political climate in Thailand must be determined in order to view the acceptability of a U.S. supported canal.

Beyond the existing political relationships between Thailand and the United States stands the possibility of the People's Republic of China exercising influence in Indochina. With roots in Dynastic China, the present Chinese government advocates a hands-off policy in Southeast Asia. Specifically, the Chinese would like to prohibit foreign nations from establishing bases in the area, and maintain the area free from Western alliances. A United States supported Kra Canal would not be compatible with Communist Chinese security objectives.

#### 1. Present United States-Thailand Relationships

Thailand, allied with Japan during the Second World War, shifted their political allegiance following the war to the side of the United States. A member of SEATO, Thailand remained close to the United States during the Cold War and in the initial





phases of active participation by the United States in Vietnam. The United States used Thailand's strategic geographical position during the Vietnam War to locate air bases. Reconnaissance and bombing missions were flown from aircraft based in Thailand. B-52 bombers and SR-71 spyplanes used Thailand's airbases for operations in Vietnam. The government of Thailand, however, began to change its political orientation in the early 1970's, just as it had done during World War Two. Thailand is vividly aware of the Communist Chinese policy of no foreign bases nor political alliances with Western powers in Indochina. Moreover, Thailand could readily see the declining U.S. political strength in Vietnam.

In May of 1971, the Wall Street Journal reported: "Thai leaders, less and less sure of a long term U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, seek better relations with North Vietnam, China, maybe North Korea."<sup>20</sup> This 1971 statement is unusual, given that the United States airplanes were conducting air raids in North Vietnam from bases in Thailand. "Bangkok declares U.S. bases are in Thailand only for the War's duration,"<sup>21</sup> the article continued. In the spring of 1972 massive bombing runs

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<sup>20</sup>"U.S.-Ally Thailand Begins Warming Up to Asian Communist Nations," Wall Street Journal, 7 May 1972, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



were made on North Vietnam. Thailand again questioned the presence of U.S. bases. "Their presence causes friction with Thailand's neighbors, plus internal political problems. Eventually the United States will probably be invited out."<sup>22</sup>

Thailand's political orientation did not take a dramatic change. Rather, a slow move from the Western alliance was indicated. A sudden shift to China, and the removal of all U.S. bases in Thailand, did not seem politically attractive. China was reluctant to see a sudden end to U.S. bases in Thailand. "While keen to see an end to American military intervention in the Far East, China must recognize that a sudden power vacuum in the area could lead to increased Soviet influence."<sup>23</sup> A slow but persistent move to end U.S. bases in Thailand would best serve the interests of Thailand and China.

The political climate in Thailand took a major change in October, 1973. Military rule was overthrown, and replaced by a civilian government. The change in governments did not offer a significant shift in the Thai political orientation. William Hartley, writing in the Wall Street Journal, said: "There is little immediate worry, in the opinion of informed

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<sup>22</sup>"After Vietnam: U.S.-ally Thailand Grows Nervous About its Future," Wall Street Journal, 10 November 1972, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup>David Bonavia, "China Hopes for Removal of American Air Threat," London Times, 15 February 1973, p. 6.



sources here, about the future of the substantial U.S. military forces in this country."<sup>24</sup> However, in January, 1974, the new Foreign Minister of Thailand, Charunphan Isarangkun, emphasized a reorientation of American emphasis in Thailand, from military to economic and technical cooperation. Prime Minister Charunphan said, "Thailand's future relations with the U.S. will have to be modified and adapted to changing circumstances. During the past decade one characteristic of our relations with the United States has been an over-emphasis on military cooperation. This needs to be adjusted in order to achieve a more truly balanced relationship."<sup>25</sup>

At this point, the Thai foreign policy seems to be split. The new civilian government indicated that U.S. air bases would not be ejected until the war in Indochina was concluded. However, use of U.S. bases for purposes other than air activity in Indochina would not be acceptable to Thai leaders. Prime Minister Charunphan clarified Thailand's position on the American air bases. The Thai government "had no intentions of

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<sup>24</sup>William D. Hartley, "Bangkok Likely to Maintain Close Ties with U.S.; Main Tasks Facing New Regime Appear Domestic," Wall Street Journal, 17 October 1973, p. 42.

<sup>25</sup>Norman Peagam, "In the US Orbit for the Moment," Far Eastern Economic Review, 18 October 1974, Focus, p. 3.





seeking large-scale withdrawal of United States military forces from Thai bases until it was satisfied that war was ended in this part of the world."<sup>26</sup>

If the Thai government felt strong enough about the threat to their security from the war in Vietnam to allow U.S. air bases within their country, they took steps to preclude their involvement in other areas of South Asia. "In July (1974) the Thai government formally asked the U.S. to stop flying reconnaissance missions over the Indian Ocean from U-Tapao Airbase in Thailand."<sup>27</sup> This limitation followed a statement by U.S. Defense Secretary James Schlesinger that, "B-52's based in Thailand might be employed to patrol the Indian Ocean."<sup>28</sup> Thai Foreign Minister Charunphan said that the reconnaissance flights "Contradicted Thailand's support for the U.S. resolution declaring the Indian Ocean a zone of peace; that they undermined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations declaration on peace and neutrality."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>James F. Clarity, "Thai Urges Soviet to Help Bring Peace to Indochina," New York Times, 17 January 1974, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>Peagam, loc. cit.

<sup>28</sup>Jidbhand Kambhu, "Uncertain Direction," Far Eastern Economic Review, 8 April 1974, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup>Peagam, loc. cit.



The apparent dichotomy in Thailand's foreign policy stems from its perception of its national interests. The war in Vietnam and throughout Indochina poses a real threat to Thailand's security, owing to the geographical proximity. For this reason, there remains in Thailand about 350 U.S. airplanes, and 27,500 Americans.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Thailand recognizes the interests of the Chinese, and does not want to provoke a deleterious response from China if Thailand were to support U.S. forces for Indian Ocean operations. Thailand recognizes the threat from within Indochina, but does not attach a similar threat potential from the Indian Ocean. As a result, the Thais allow U.S. forces to operate against insurgents in Indochina, but pursue a non-involvement policy with respect to the Indian Ocean.

## 2. Future United States-Thailand Relations

Under the surface there appears to be a gradual re-orientation in the direction of Thailand's foreign policy. The Thais are no longer strong allies of the United States, nor have they shifted allegiance to China or the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Thai policy is not vacillating between the two. On 3 March 1975 Thailand's Defense Minister, Thawit Seniwong,

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<sup>30</sup>Norman Peagam, "The American Shield Remains," Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 September 1974, p. 14.



indicated that Thailand was going to "call for the withdrawal of all American forces stationed in the country within 18 months."<sup>31</sup> Seniwong included in his statement the caveat that the withdrawal of U.S. forces would be held in abeyance if a critical military situation existed. This statement is consistent with Thailand's concern with insurgent military activity in Indochina, along with a lack of similar concern with out-of-area military activity. Although the Thai civilian government, led by Prime Minister Seni Pramoj, did not receive a majority in a vote of confidence held two days later, the prevalent attitude in Thailand remains suspect of the U.S. military presence. At the same time, Thailand has begun to establish closer ties with the Soviet Union. Thai Foreign Minister Charunphan said of the Soviets, "As regards the conflict in Indochina in particular, we believe that the Soviet Union is in a strong position to contribute to the restoration of peace and harmony to the long suffering people living there, and thereby contribute positively to the stability of the entire region."<sup>32</sup> Relations with China also became more cordial following the October 1973 coup. James Markham, writing in the

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<sup>31</sup>"Thailand to Ask U.S. Forces' Withdrawal," Monterey Peninsula Herald, 3 March 1975, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Clarity, loc. cit.





New York Times, indicated Thailand's political shift. "Thailand's search for a more comfortable place in Southeast Asia--without heavy American protection, will probably continue apace."<sup>33</sup>

Thailand is surrounded on the eastern half of its border by countries deeply involved in national liberation movements, mostly with a Communist base. The Chinese appear to be strongly stimulating these movements. Thailand, by taking a position least offensive to the Chinese, would probably mitigate the liberation movements in their country.

Many factors contribute to Thailand's perception of its national interests. The inability of the United States to resolve the Vietnam Conflict, the intensity of national liberation movements in Indochina, the potential dominance of China once again in Southeast Asia, and the differences between the Soviet Union and China are undoubtedly major factors. Trend extrapolation from Thailand's recent past indicates a continued shift away from the United States. Thailand knows the U.S. needs its geographical location, for it is the only place where air bases can be located for operations in Indochina. Moreover, Thailand's security policy in part takes into account American efforts against the revolutionary Communist movements in Laos,

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<sup>33</sup>James M. Markham, "Thailand's Role in Asia," New York Times, 25 May 1974, p. 9.





Cambodia, and Vietnam. Nevertheless, Thailand is also cognizant of China's policy of non-support and alliance-free from Western nations. These incompatible factors motivate Thailand's dichotomous foreign policy--to allow American bases to support efforts in Indochina, and to pursue non-involvement in other geographical areas.

#### E. SUMMARY

The Indonesia-Malay Peninsula Barrier to access between the western Pacific and Indian Oceans has given special importance to Thailand's Isthmus of Kra--for this narrow band of land separating the two oceans offers the only potential area where a canal might be constructed. The motivating factors for the Kra Canal project have changed over the years, but the impact of a completed Kra Canal on the international relations, economic structure and military balance of nations involved, both geographically and politically, have remained influential factors.

Current emphasis for the Kra Canal is economically motivated. The navigational size limitations on supertankers through the Malacca Straits, coupled with the Indonesia-Malaysia threats to limit the passage for certain size vessels through the Straits prompt the search for a shorter route than around the eastern end of the Indonesian Archipelago.



Of lesser current importance, but with great potential, are the military implications of the canal. If either the Soviet Union, or the United States, could gain free access to, or partial control of, the Kra Canal, they could more rapidly introduce naval vessels into the Indian Ocean. Time savings using the canal over the Malacca Straits is not significant unless an urgent crisis requires an immediate response. However, if the Straits were closed to passage of all warships, then the canal becomes tactically important to that nation having access to the canal.

While the United States could determine that a canal might not offer advantages to its naval operations within the Indian Ocean, it still must project the advantages that a canal would give to other nations if they supported the canal's construction and obtained usage and control privileges. Such control of the canal could threaten U.S. security objectives in the Ocean, so that the U.S. might consider support of the canal project to preclude an adversary power from gaining influence or control of the canal.

The Kra Canal will become a reality only if Thailand agrees to, and supports, its construction. This non-industrialized nation, with only limited technological capabilities, would need the support of a nation capable of building the canal. However, in helping Thailand construct the canal in exchange for



usage privileges and operation control, the supporting nation must be politically acceptable to Thailand. Constraints on Thailand come from China, who exercises considerable influence in Southeast Asia. China's emphasis of no alliances or foreign bases in the area contradict foreign power support with special privileges for the canal.

The estimated construction costs of eight million dollars, coupled with a completion date some ten years following initiation of construction, are definite obstacles to overcome. Estimates of construction costs will increase over time, and the approximate construction time will also add to the ultimate cost. The financial return on the canal investment must necessarily support the initial costs of the canal. Furthermore, it is expected that ocean transportation will improve during the anticipated time of construction, which could render the canal obsolete before it becomes operational.

In order for the United States to become involved in the construction of the Kra Canal, U.S.-Thailand relations must be compatible with respect to the usage of the canal. The present political climate in Thailand, together with their apparent political shift away from the United States, does not portend the possibility of U.S. involvement in the in the Kra Canal.





It is doubtful that the Kra Canal will ever become a reality. Frustrated by the canal's impact on international relations, and the increasing expense of construction, the recurrent proposals for the canal have been unsuccessful. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to automatically dismiss the possibility of a canal, and any valid proposal should receive consideration.



### III. ASSUMED NATIONAL INTERESTS

Construction of a canal across Thailand's Isthmus of Kra could possibly offer certain limited naval advantages over other routes through the Barrier for the United States in pursuit of national interests within the Indian Ocean. In order to analyze the validity of a specific foreign policy in support of the national interests, the national interests themselves must be defined. Moreover, national interests change over time, so that a definition of national interests for a specific time period may not correspond to the interests for another time. Consequently, this thesis will structure an assumed national interest for the United States in the Indian Ocean, and analyze the proposed foreign policy against this assumption.

#### A. OPERATIONALIZATIONS

##### 1. National Interests

The concept of "national interest" has been the subject of many thoughtful and scholarly discussions. Different interpretations of "national interest" have been proposed, and in itself this concept is most complex and easily misunderstood. For purposes of clarity within this paper, "national interests" will be defined to the extent that its intended usage will be



clearly understood, and interpreted with the same meaning by every reader.

The traditional international relations definition of national interest is perhaps best represented by Hans Morgenthau. A more modern interpretation, but one which closely resembles Morgenthau's has been expressed by Frederick H. Hartman. In defining "national interest," the basic ideas of these two authors will be synthesized into an operational definition.

Hartman defines the general meaning and scope of national interest:

"National interests cover categories of desires on the part of sovereign states that vary enormously from state to state and from time to time. There is an irreducible core for any state at any time. This core consists of the 'vital' interests--those for which a state is normally willing to fight immediately or ultimately. Such vital interests include for all states, as a minimum, the protection of their existing territory and the preservation of their prestige from a massive 'loss of face.' By contrast, the less-than-vital or secondary interests cover all the myriad desires of individual states which they would like to attain but for which they will not fight."<sup>34</sup>

Morgenthau agrees on the idea of primary or secondary interests; but to this he adds two additional dimensions: the degree of permanence of the interest, and the degree of generality of the interest.<sup>35</sup> These two additional dimensions give the operational

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<sup>34</sup>Frederick H. Hartman, The Relations of Nations, 4th ed., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), p. 6.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas W. Robinson, International Politics and Foreign Policy, ed. by James N. Rosenau, (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 184.



definition of "national interest" the property of changing over time (permanence) and the degree to which the national interest is applied in a specific geographical area, or the specificity of the geographical area itself.

In order for a nation to develop its national interests, it must first determine its perception of the international political environment, and what role it will attempt to play in this environment. A framework of national interests will be developed to support its perceived role. This framework will necessarily be constrained by the nation's ability to successfully pursue its national interests, and the real world's reaction to the pursuit of these national interests.

National interests are rarely packaged in definitive form by a nation for all other nations to observe. Rather, a foreign policy is developed from that framework of national interest which a nation has perceived to be in consonance with the real world and its role in the real world.

"Taken together, the vital and secondary interests of states are important in international relations, because they form the raw material out of which foreign policy is made. An ideal foreign policy, once formulated, contains a systematic selection of national interests in which inconsistent interests have been weeded out, the interests have been judged against one another in terms of priorities, and the interests as a whole have been budgeted against the estimated power and potential of the state to achieve





those interests. A foreign policy at any one time will therefore not contain all possible national interests, but only those selected for implementation."<sup>36</sup>

Other national actors in the international arena must observe the whole of a specific nation's foreign policy, and from this infer what that nation's guiding framework of national interest consists of. The perception of the real world by a nation, and its resultant foreign policy in support of its national interest, combined with the individual inferences by all nations of the meaning and intent of the foreign policy promote the complexity of the international relations picture. This complexity severely limits governments in assuming national interests, or foreign policy, without regard for the real world. Care must be exercised to ensure that the implementation of foreign policy accurately reflects a nation's national interest but does not conflict with other national interests that it perceives to exist in the real world.

## 2. Foreign Policy

National interests provide the goals to which American foreign policy must be oriented. Foreign policy drives the diplomatic, economic, and military policies of a nation in the international arena. Unlike national interests, which contain

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<sup>36</sup>Hartman, op. cit., p. 6.



general policy goals, foreign policy must contend with many external and internal factors in pursuit of the national interest objectives, where numerous corridors leading to those goals are available. Foreign policy is the means for ensuring that national interests are adequately protected.

### 3. Major Task Force Within the Indian Ocean

The United States Navy has a permanent, Indian Ocean naval component based at the former British naval base on the Island of Bahrain. This naval unit consists of an amphibious landing ship modified to support command and control functions and two destroyer-type ships. An extreme alternative to this rather modest naval force is the formidable aircraft carrier task group, with a nucleus of an attack aircraft carrier, supported by several surface-to-air missile bearing destroyers/ frigates. A major task force within the Indian Ocean is defined as an aircraft carrier task group, possibly supported by amphibious and logistic units.

### 4. Major Operating Naval Base Within the Indian Ocean

The United States Navy is currently utilizing the former British naval facilities on the island emirate of Bahrain as the operating base for its Middle East Force. The limited base facility in Jufair Bay is maintained by 300 shore personnel; it is restricted in the number and size of ships that it can accommodate. A major operating base within the Indian Ocean



must be capable of providing logistic and maintenance support for major naval combatants, up to and including attack aircraft carriers. Such an operating base has been proposed for the British-owned island of Diego Garcia, in the Chagos Island group approximately 1,000 miles south of India.

## 5. Naval Policy

Foreign policy can be divided into its many individual components under the general categories of military, political, and economic. Further breakdown of military policy will yield specific policies of the various military services. Naval policy is defined as that sub-component of the military component of foreign policy. As a specific foreign policy is applied in a specific sector of the international setting, those specific tactics to be employed by the navy in support of the foreign policy comprise naval policy.

## 6. Threat to National Interests

One nation can threaten another by applying a foreign policy contrary to the national interests of the other. The threat may take the form of clearly implied and credible foreign policy objectives which would prevent the threatened nation from pursuing its national interests. Or, the threat may be only perceived by the "threatened" nation, basing its perception of threat on key indicators exhibited by the nation. It is not sufficient that an actual, well-defined, intentioned threat





exist to a nation's national interest in order to provoke a response from the threatened nation. Rather, a nation will respond to threats that it perceives to exist that place the national interests in danger, regardless of the authenticity of these threats. Therefore, a threat to a country's national interest by another nation or alliance of nations is defined to exist if this country perceives that its national interests are threatened.

#### 7. The Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean

Naval units from the Soviet Union first entered the Indian Ocean in March, 1968, when a cruiser and two destroyers, together with logistic support ships, deployed for four months in the area. The Soviet deployment into the Ocean reflected a new emphasis for the Soviet Navy. During the Second World War, and in the immediate period thereafter, the Soviet Navy was primarily coastal-defense oriented. However, as the Soviet Union regained its strength following the ravages of war, the navy began to assume a larger proportion of military emphasis, and correspondingly, a larger role in the implementation of national objectives. The first out of area deployment to the Mediterranean occurred in 1964. Four years later the Soviets moved their naval presence into the Indian Ocean.

From the initial deployment in 1968, the Soviets made subsequent visits beginning in November, 1968. The second



Soviet Naval force into the Ocean was composed of a guided missile equipped cruiser, a destroyer, and a submarine tender. Subsequent forces contained more units, and possessed considerably more firepower. "By an October 1970 estimate the Soviet Naval squadron deployed in the Indian Ocean consisted of approximately 20 vessels: 5 guided missile ships (cruisers or destroyers), 6 supply ships, 3 submarines, and several intelligence ships, among others."<sup>37</sup> The total "shipmonths" rose from 20 in 1968 to 31 in 1969 and 44 in 1970.<sup>38</sup>

The Soviet naval strength in the Ocean has remained fairly constant in numbers. It is reported that on the average, one cruiser, several destroyers and submarines, one amphibious assault ship, three minesweepers, and approximately 17 non-combatant support ships are in the Indian Ocean at any one time.<sup>39</sup> While the force levels themselves have not appreciably changed since 1970, the type of units deployed to the Indian Ocean has changed. Newer and more sophisticated ships, representing the latest state-of-the-arts in propulsion, fire control, and weapon

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<sup>37</sup>Shinsaku Hogen, "The Present State of the Indian Ocean," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 380.

<sup>38</sup>A.M. Rendel, London Times, 16 June 1972, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup>James Laurie, "The Hardware for Potential Confrontation," Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 1974, p. 31.



delivery systems, have replaced the older units. Although force numbers have not escalated, the combat capability has been increased.

The Soviet Naval build-up in the Ocean represents more than a superior force compared with the U.S. Middle East Force. There are those who believe that the Soviet Union is building a foundation within the littoral from which to conduct more extended operations in the Indian Ocean. The Soviet Union does not have any permanent support facility in the Ocean, although anchorages and mooring bouys have been laid near the Seychelles Islands, Mauritius, and in the Arabian Sea.<sup>40</sup> The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in May, 1974, that the Soviets "have expanded their facilities at the Somalia port of Berbera, where they have a communications station and a restricted area with a combined barracks and repair ship facility."<sup>41</sup> The Soviets have also helped littoral nations in port construction, most notably in Iraq at Umm Qasr, and in India. Admiral Zumwalt concluded in March 1974 that the Soviets now possess a support system in the Indian Ocean "substantially more extensive than that of the United States, with access to harbors or airstrips in Somalia,

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<sup>40</sup>Hanson W. Baldwin, "Staking Their Claims," New York Times, 21 March 1972, p. 41.

<sup>41</sup>James Laurie, "The Hardware for Potential Confrontation," Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 1974, p. 31.





Iraq and southern Yemen."<sup>42</sup> The Russians also have agreements with other area countries for port access and facilities. Among these are Egyptian Red Sea ports, Aden, the Island of Socotra in the Gulf of Aden, and Mauritius. Hanson Baldwin writing in the New York Times stated: "The Soviet build-up around the Indian Ocean littoral is far more important than the small naval forces they maintain there."<sup>43</sup>

The pattern of deployment for Soviet Naval units in the Indian Ocean does not indicate a change in force levels currently maintained. The Soviet Naval activity in the Ocean centers in the northwest quadrant, "with Somalia being fostered as the point d'appui and the port of Berbera serving as the main forward base."<sup>44</sup> When and if the Suez Canal opens will undoubtedly change the pattern of operations within the Ocean, and could possibly alter the force structure.

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<sup>42</sup>John W. Finney, "Zumwalt backs U.S. Plans for Indian Ocean Base," New York Times, 21 March 1974, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup>Hanson W. Baldwin, "Staking Their Claims," New York Times, 21 March 1972, p. 41.

<sup>44</sup>Michael McGuire, ed., Soviet Naval Developments, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 435.





## B. ASSUMED NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

American national interests within the Indian Ocean and its littoral states are defined to contain, but not limited to, these characteristics:

1. Maintenance of free and open surface and air lines of communications throughout the area of the Indian Ocean.
2. Surveillance of foreign naval activity within the Indian Ocean.
3. Protection of American citizens throughout the littoral.
4. Access to littoral nations.

The projection of American national interests on a global scale following World War Two has been subjected to rigid re-evaluation following the Vietnam conflict. The United States must develop its national interests in order that it may successfully interact in the international political sphere as it exists today, and as it is projected into the near future. Policies which are formulated to support these national interests must be evaluated in terms of current national and international attitudes. The Nixon Doctrine, as stated by former President Nixon, indicates that in the future the policy of the United States will be one of a lowered profile which relies on other nations for a considerable proportion of the resources necessary for their defense. In light of this doctrine, as well as the



current reluctance on the part of Congress for new military expenditures or foreign commitments, any decision to increase American efforts in the Indian Ocean area would have to be thoroughly justified by reasons of national interests.

The foreign policy of the United States in the Indian Ocean and the littoral states, in support of the national interest, is most easily effected through diplomatic activity within the littoral states themselves, strengthened when necessary by the naval component of the armed forces. The overt act of admitting ground forces into any of the littoral states during a peacetime environment is totally repugnant to the current domestic attitude of the American populace as well as the Indian Ocean littoral. Moreover, Air Force elements would require land bases from which to operate, and again would constitute overt intrusion of the United States armed forces into the littoral. Only at sea can the United States provide the necessary military strength without challenging the sovereignty of the littoral states. Only by sea can the United States effectively provide material and combat support within the littoral if these states are threatened by internal revolutionary forces or third party support for local guerrilla revolutionary warfare. This prompts the assumption that American national interests within the Indian Ocean, as implemented through foreign policy, are most effectively maintained in peacetime by the United States Navy.



National interests applied to a specific geographic area are multi-faceted and complex. This definition of an assumed national interest will strongly address the Soviet Naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and the potential implications of that presence. In order for this thesis to maintain a modicum of validity over time, a realistic and potential environment in which the national interests will be structured must be proposed.

The potential Soviet naval threat in the Indian Ocean has received the most attention by area analysts. While it is recognized that the present level of Soviet naval activity within the Ocean does not represent a substantial threat, the trends of worldwide Soviet naval activity seem to indicate an increasing naval role in Soviet foreign policy. Seymour Weiss, Director, Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs of the Department of State, stated in April, 1974: "As their naval forces and airlift capabilities have grown, they have demonstrated a complete willingness to project military power into more distant areas and to use military assistance and shows of force to influence events where their major interests are at stake."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>U.S. Department of State, The Department of State Bulletin, Washington D. C., Government Printing Office, 8 April 1974, p. 372.





Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, former Chief of Naval Operations, speaking at a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in April, 1974, remarked:

"Those interests (of the United States in the Indian Ocean) relate mainly to the area's key resources, and to the transportation routes which carry them to the United States, its friends and its allies. My remarks today will focus not only on those interests but also on the need to provide ourselves an adequate capability to respond to military contingencies affecting our interests and the significant, increasing ability of the Soviet Union to threaten those interests."<sup>46</sup>

It is logical to conclude that the aspects of the Soviet naval activity in the Indian Ocean, whether real or unfounded, have become a central issue regarding U.S. interests in the Ocean. The hypothetical character of this assumed national interest recognizes both the potential threat of the Soviets in the Indian Ocean, and the high level of credulence given to this subject by U.S. policy planners.

In order to design a foreign policy to support national interests, it is necessary to explore national interest by itself. Although highly inter-related, a country's national interest can be divided into three broad categories: economic, political and military.

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<sup>46</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Briefings on Diego Garcia and Patrol Frigate, Hearings, 93rd Cong., 2d Sess., Washington D. C., Government Printing Office, 1974, p. 2.



## 1. Economic Interests

The United States has limited direct economic interests in the Indian Ocean. "Apart from oil investments in the Persian Gulf, nothing here compares to U.S. trade and investments in Western Europe, Latin America, or East Asia or to U.S. strategic interests in Western Europe or Japan."<sup>47</sup> U.S. oil investments on the Arabian Peninsula are considerable. While the major oil resource nations of Saudi Arabia and Iran are moving toward increased nationalization of foreign-owned investments, the flow of oil to the West is nonetheless tied to vital economic interests of U.S. industry.

Aside from the Middle East crude oil resources, the United States does not maintain strong trade relationships with Indian Ocean littoral nations. "The United States has a strong positive trade balance with Indian Ocean area countries, suggesting that they need American products more than the United States needs their raw materials."<sup>48</sup> Although the economic interests might not be of a vital nature to the United

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<sup>47</sup>Howard Wriggins, "U.S. Interests in the Indian Ocean," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R. M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 358.

<sup>48</sup>Keith Trace, "International Trade and Commercial Relations," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R. M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 41.



States, the political implications of providing raw foodstuffs and finished goods to the littoral can be of great importance in the developing nations.

Closely related to the economic aspects of national interests is the maintenance of, and free access to, the sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean. The lanes of communication can be segmented into two separate categories: those sea lanes which involve trade with one or more Indian Ocean area nations, and those lanes which allow transit through the Indian Ocean without trade relationships in the littoral nations.

Perhaps because of their extensive colonial past in the Indian Ocean, Great Britain has major economic interests in the Indian Ocean. "...some 28 percent of its merchandise exports are consigned to countries bordering the Indian and West Pacific Oceans. Put rather more forcefully, the U.K.'s east-of-Suez trade is larger than the rest of Europe's put together."<sup>49</sup> Western Europe operates more commercial ships in and through the Indian Ocean than in either the Mediterranean or the Pacific Oceans. Not only are they active in trade relationships to obtain raw materials and export finished products, but also to receive vital crude oil. Western Europe

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 40.





is almost totally dependent on the Middle East for oil. Forty-nine percent of Western Europe's oil imports come from the Middle East, while 32 percent is imported from North Africa.<sup>50</sup> Western Europe's economic interests are very dependent on Middle Eastern oil exports. If these oil exports were interrupted, the national security of Western Europe would be dangerously threatened, and European components of NATO forces would be severely weakened.

"Japan is almost totally dependent on Persian Gulf oil-- in 1969 out of its total imports of 170 million tons, 150 million came from the Middle East and almost all the rest from Indonesia."<sup>51</sup> The importance of the Middle East oil to Japan is even greater than to Western Europe, and Japan's national security would likewise be threatened if the oil flow were to be interrupted.

Western Europe and Japan are both important links to the national security structure of the United States. If one or both were to be denied access to the Indian Ocean, U.S. national security interests would be weakened. Whereas the direct economic involvement of the United States is limited in relation

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<sup>50</sup>Charles Issawi, "The Politics and Economics of Natural Resources," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R. M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 20.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 19.





to Western Europe and Japan, and if the Indian Ocean were to be closed to free and open access to trade, the impact of the loss of the Indian Ocean trade would be much less severe to the United States than to either Western Europe or Japan. It is of prime importance for the United States to maintain free access to the sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean so that the strategic balance of power will not be threatened or eroded.

## 2. Political Interests

The United States is faced with a dilemma in the Indian Ocean--that of a rising Soviet naval role in support of foreign policy, and at the same time a continuing sense of nationalism and non-alignment of the stronger littoral states. If the Soviet-United States naval buildup takes on the characteristics of the Richardson escalation model, the littoral states will not be politically accommodating. However, the United States can hardly allow the Soviets to be unchecked in the Indian Ocean.

A more moderate view of U.S. political involvement in the Indian Ocean can be directed at a post-Vietnam strategy of controlling the sea lanes of communications in the Indian Ocean. This policy would require that sufficient naval strength be available to offset threatening naval forces. The United States must therefore assume a naval posture strong enough to ensure



freedom of the seas, yet not so strong that the littoral states would feel threatened.

The Indian Ocean littoral is made up of many developing Third World nations--acquiring a growing sense of nationalism and, more recently, an attitude of increasing international importance. Most of these Third World nations are technologically lacking, although they possess an abundance of natural resources. The lack of technological background, coupled with the desirability of the natural resources, results in relationships between the strong, technologically-developed nations and the Third World countries. It is a peculiar relationship at best--the strong and dominating nation and the weak, emerging one. The relationship can assume a variety of forms, ranging from informal trade relationships to complete subjugation and colonialization.

A major power's relationship with Third World nations must be carefully planned and executed. The great power must first establish the goals to which the relationship is to be oriented. The needs or the goals of the Third World nation must be determined and taken into consideration when planning the type of relationship. Finally, attitudes of other major-power nations and key national actors in the geographic area must be determined if the specific relationship is effected.



The Nixon Doctrine emphasizes "self-help" and encourages regional areas to provide for their own mutual assistance. Marshall R. Singer, in his 1972 work Weak States in a World of Powers, while not directly stating the Nixon Doctrine, discussed the relationships between great powers and Third World nations. Singer feels that the relationships should be guided by the concept of interdependence. "Dependent states are in reality of little advantage to the Power in either peace or war, while interdependent states are a major advantage at all times. Dependence tends to breed counterdependence. Interdependence tends to breed further interdependence."<sup>52</sup>

The relationships between the Indian Ocean littoral nations and the United States, when viewed in the context of national goals and international attitudes, should aspire to promote interdependence and adherence to the principles of the Nixon Doctrine.

"The needs of the weaker states are real and there is no reason why they would or should feel demeaned by making efforts to fulfill those needs from whichever Powers will cooperate on the basis of reciprocal mutual interest. The Powers must make clear precisely what it is they are doing when they seek to fulfill those needs for specific weaker countries, and the weaker states must make clear precisely what they are doing when they seek to fulfill those needs from as many different Powers as possible!"<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Marshall R. Singer, Weak States in a World of Powers, (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p. 380

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 370.





### 3. Military Interests

While the military interests of the United States make up a key part of the economic and political interests, there are some situations which are uniquely military in nature. The military interests of the United States are closely related to the naval activity of the Soviet Union. An examination of the Soviets' Naval past in the Indian Ocean reveals that their expansion into the area began modestly in 1968, and has expanded in terms of deployment duration and force levels. Like the United States, they have no claim to the littoral of the Indian Ocean. Their reasons for this forward deployment into the area are not clearly understood. One source provides the following explanation: "Recent Soviet actions indicate that the USSR intends to maintain a credible military presence in the Indian Ocean and to increase its trade and influence in the area."<sup>54</sup> Another source speaks of "...national prestige, gaining influence, showing the flag, filling a power vacuum, gunboat diplomacy, and the installation and protection of progressive regimes from internal and external threats, including threats from the United States."<sup>55</sup> Whatever the underlying Politburo reasons for

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<sup>54</sup>B. F. Coye, et al., "An Evaluation of U.S. Naval Presence in the Indian Ocean," Naval War College Review, Oct., 1970, p. 35.

<sup>55</sup>James M. McConnell, "The Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean," Soviet Naval Developments, ed. by Michael McGuire, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 389.



deployment of Soviet Naval units into the Indian Ocean, the American policy-makers must react to their own perceived reasons for the Soviet deployment, which, in turn, will form the basis for the perceived threats to American national interests and resulting foreign policy.

Current American political philosophy tends along worst-case planning. Through a review of the potential carried by Soviet Naval units in the Indian Ocean, American planners can predict possible scenarios for Soviet units as: 1. disruption of merchant lines of communications, 2. use of Soviet naval units to provide direct material and combat assistance to revolutionary movements within the littoral nations, 3. deny the use of the Indian Ocean to foreign combatants, and 4. control the sea lanes across the Indian Ocean. These potential scenarios provide the deep rooted support for the proponents of a strong Indian Ocean American Naval presence.

The Indian Ocean littoral and its non-alignment and anti-foreigner philosophy must be carefully evaluated in the context of the increasing Soviet Naval presence, and what effect this naval presence has on American national interests. As the Indian Ocean can be fairly rapidly reinforced from U.S. Pacific and Atlantic Fleet naval units, the principal question focuses on the necessity to introduce a new, permanent task force into the area. By not maintaining a task force in this area, the



United States would sacrifice the ability to immediately respond to any quickly developing crisis. Viewing the American national interest as either economic, political, or military, or some combination of these, the naval posture that is employed in the Indian Ocean must be adequate to perform the required mission.

An additional consideration of American policy in the Indian Ocean includes the use of littoral nations, friendly to the United States and in agreement with the foreign policy objectives, to maintain U.S. security objectives in the Ocean. This approach is not overly appealing in that most littoral states do not totally agree with the United States national interests, and therefore may balk at some point in supporting U.S. interests. Furthermore, it would be necessary for the U.S.-allied littoral nations to be clearly identified as such in order that they might serve as a deterrent to actions by others against our interests. Not only would this increase the credibility of a response to activities contrary to U.S. interests, but also it would promote the understanding along the littoral of the American national interests. At the same time, however, overt political relationships which in effect would give the United States a proxy-presence in the Indian Ocean would run contrary to the prevailing littoral attitude of nonalignment. Therefore, it will be assumed for the purpose





of a clear presentation of national interests that some form of U.S. presence or complete absence will be required.

Aside from the potential Soviet Naval threat in the Indian Ocean, there exists the military involvement by the United States within littoral nations. The United States has in the past supported newly independent states in the area.

"The United States has played an active diplomatic role in the area since World War II, exercising such varied tools of diplomacy as development assistance, military assistance, political mediation, and U.S. initiatives in an effort to discourage conflict and contain it when it occurs. Obviously one of the diplomatic levers available to us is the deterrent effect of a military presence. We believe that the modest presence we have traditionally maintained in the Persian Gulf, supplemented as necessary by more frequent deployments of additional ships, serves that purpose."<sup>56</sup>

United States military interests must include the possibility of military activity within the littoral. The activity can take several forms, including support for a littoral nation threatened by an external pressure, or a direct U.S. military confrontation with a belligerent littoral nation itself.

#### 4. Reconnaissance Network

"In a major test of America's post-Vietnam foreign policy, the United States Navy has secretly organized an informal alliance

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<sup>56</sup>Seymour Weiss, "U.S. Interests and Activities in the Indian Ocean," U.S. Department of State, The Department of State Bulletin, Washington D. C., Government Printing Office, 8 April 1974, p. 374.





of the most powerful states in the Indian Ocean area. Iran, South Africa, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and other countries are now linked in a military reconnaissance network which spans the area from the Straits of Malacca in the east to the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa."<sup>57</sup> The concept of the reconnaissance network is not idealistic. The entrances to the Indian Ocean have been limited by geography. Only two entrances are of any size: south of the Cape of Good Hope and south of Australia. More narrow routes include the Indonesian Straits, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz of the Persian Gulf. The United States is fairly well allied with the major countries dominating these passages, and can effectively monitor surface ship movements into the Indian Ocean. Supplemented by reconnaissance aircraft from area air bases and overhead reconnaissance satellites, the United States can monitor foreign navy surface ship movements in the Indian Ocean, while maintaining the low-key naval posture that is acceptable to the littoral of the Indian Ocean.

This informally aligned reconnaissance network does not represent a permanent component of the U.S. Indian Ocean military policy. Political relationships within some of the participating

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<sup>57</sup>Tom Engelhardt, "A Calculated Gamble for Naval Power," Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 1974, p. 30.



nations could change; chinks in the reconnaissance chain could develop. Tom Engelhardt, writing in the Far Eastern Economic Review, feels that a serious weakness with this network is the very nature of the governments of these countries. "From South Africa and Iran to Indonesia and Thailand, U.S.-backed regimes preside over volatile, potentially discontented populations."<sup>58</sup> Another drawback to the network is a lack of sub-surface surveillance. Moreover, overhead satellite reconnaissance and aircraft reconnaissance patrols are subjected to the weather. At best the reconnaissance network is of limited accuracy and coverage in regard to ocean traffic within the Indian Ocean. However, the ability of this network to monitor foreign navy surface activity in the Indian Ocean is not completely diminished. The United States Navy could quickly augment its present Indian Ocean forces if a Soviet buildup is anticipated or effected. Furthermore, if political conditions within the area littoral threaten that which the United States perceives as its national interests, U.S. Naval units could respond from the Sixth or Seventh Fleets.

##### 5. Summation of Assumed National Interests

Economically and militarily, the Soviet Union does not now project its Indian Ocean naval strength against American

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 30.



perceptions of national security. Any overt, aggressive action by the Soviets would evoke a determined U.S. response, and the United States Navy can more rapidly bring to bear overwhelming sea and air superiority.

Only in the realm of Third World nations does the Soviet Fleet-in-being contest the ideals and ideology of the Western world as perceived by the United States. The Soviet Naval presence, their willingness to provide support, and their present naval force level in the Indian Ocean are clear advantages that they have over the absence of a permanent U.S. naval task force. Nevertheless, the attitudes of the Nixon Doctrine, coupled with the post-Vietnam political position of the American government, reduces the impact that these Third World nations exert on U.S. national interests.

An article appearing in the October, 1970 issue of the Naval War College Review concluded a survey of the U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean: "in the final analysis U.S. interests would be served best were the United States to hold the level of its involvement in the Indian Ocean area to a low-profile, while assisting the littoral countries in protecting their own interests."<sup>59</sup> Howard Wriggins writes: "...it is

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<sup>59</sup>B. F. Coye, et al., "An Evaluation of U.S. Naval Presence in the Indian Ocean." Naval War College Review, October, 1970, p. 50.





premature to decide now that a major buildup of U.S. forces in the Indian Ocean is necessary. Indeed, such a decision might precipitate that very naval competition that neither super-power may desire."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Wriggins, op. cit.



#### IV. THE UNITED STATES NAVY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze a specific foreign policy in support of assumed American national interests in the Indian Ocean. The foreign policy under study directly involves the United States Navy, so that the history of the United States Navy in the Indian Ocean, beginning in the Second World War and continuing up to projected future operations in the Ocean, will be discussed. It is important to note that past, present and future U.S. naval operations in the Indian Ocean do not represent a force structure designed to implement the hypothetical foreign policy nor the assumed national interests of this paper. Rather, a review of the United States Navy in the Indian Ocean will present a realistic reference point from which to structure the hypothetical foreign and naval policies.

The naval involvement in specific geographical locations is the tool by which foreign policy objectives are pursued or realized. In a more limited sense the naval involvement itself is directed toward specific objectives. Some knowledge of these objectives is important in order to understand the level of naval activity in the area. A brief account of stated naval objectives in the Indian Ocean will be summarized. While



disagreements exist as to what these objectives ought to be, the current objectives guiding the United States naval policy in the Ocean will be presented.

In the discussion of the United States Navy in a specific geographical location such as the Indian Ocean, one must be careful to maintain contact with the worldwide military and political environments as well. The size and force composition of the world's navies following the Second World War, together with international interactions between various nations, have significant influence on events in the specific geographical area. This was no more clearly illustrated than during the Vietnam-United States conflict, where the United States used massive naval forces in Indochina relative to other worldwide operating areas.

#### A. THE UNITED STATES NAVY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: PAST

##### 1. Post World War II

The United States Navy following World War Two was unchallenged in superiority. Moreover, of those navies on the side of the Allies, no other navy could approach the United States Navy relative to force levels, technological advances, and successful combat experience. However, the Indian Ocean held a low priority in United States foreign policy, partly because the British remained dominant in the Ocean, and partly



because the United States held limited national interests in this then-remote area. Furthermore, American attention following the War was directed at post-war recovery and rehabilitation, rather than continued worldwide deployments and operations.

American Naval activity in the Indian Ocean during World War II was primarily based in the Persian Gulf. "Between 1941 and 1945 almost one-fourth of U.S. aid cargoes to the U.S.S.R. were shipped via the Gulf."<sup>61</sup> A separate Persian Gulf Command was established in 1943. Following the war this force was greatly reduced, and it consisted of one seaplane tender and two destroyers. In 1949 the force was re-named the Middle East Force. The Center for Naval Analysis said of this Force:

"Throughout the post-war period the major dimensions of MidEastFor have remained nearly constant: (a) its assigned forces: one seaplane tender, two destroyers, one command aircraft; (b) its area of responsibility: from the African coast to the Burma border, from the Equator to Iran; and (c) its primary mission: 'showing the flag in remote areas and to provide assurance to all countries in the Middle East Force area of our friendship and readiness to help them.'"<sup>62</sup>

The Middle East Force has maintained an unobtrusive presence in the Ocean during the period following the war. This is generally in keeping with the low priority that the Indian

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<sup>61</sup>Barry M. Blechman and Anne M. Kelly, The Soviet Presence in the Indian Ocean: Implications for U.S. Naval Planning, Center for Naval Analysis, Institute of Naval Studies, Study 36, August 1971, p. A-2.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.





Ocean occupied in United States foreign policy. "U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean are generally regarded as minimal, but attention must here be drawn again to the heavy dependence of U.S. allies in Europe on Indian Ocean trade and raw materials."<sup>63</sup> "The U.S. government appears to have accepted the sensible view that its interests are served by a virtual universal abstention from a military presence in the Indian Ocean."<sup>64</sup>

The low-key United States effort was supported by the British naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and an absence of rival navies. However, at the same time that the British were reducing their naval forces east of Suez up to 1971, the Soviet Union began to buildup a permanently deployed force commencing in 1968. Although American national interests were not immediately re-focused in this area, it is clear that the political and military environment in which they would interact had changed, and a military imbalance began to weigh in favor of the Soviets.

During the time of the 1968 Soviet entry into the Indian Ocean, the United States Navy was heavily committed in

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<sup>63</sup>Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, eds., The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic and Military Importance, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 334.

<sup>64</sup>Howard Wriggins, "U.S. Interests in the Indian Ocean," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 362.



Vietnam. The Soviet Naval force in the Indian Ocean was not engaged in overtly hostile operations; U.S. national interests did not seem to be threatened. This enabled the United States to concentrate naval forces in the Western Pacific while still maintaining the low priority in the Indian Ocean. The Soviets continued to increase the deployed Indian Ocean force size throughout the Vietnam conflict. Only after United States Naval requirements in Vietnam were reduced could the United States re-structure its naval priorities and area deployments.

## 2. Post-Vietnam

Owing to the complexities of the Vietnam war and the ongoing nature of the conflict, it is difficult to establish a specific time-frame which delineates this era. A new element in American Indian Ocean naval policy was initiated, however, during the December, 1971, Indo-Pakistan war. The United States introduced a carrier task force and an amphibious ready group into the Bay of Bengal in December 1971. This significant departure from a low-key naval presence will serve as a logical division for this discussion.

Prior to December, 1971, there have been other occasions when naval units briefly operated in the Indian Ocean. "There have been occasional pass-throughs of United States naval ships



and periodic shore visits."<sup>65</sup> However, these visits did not represent a change in the low-key approach to naval policy in the Ocean.

The United States naval response to the Indo-Pakistan War represented a new look for United States Naval policy in the Indian Ocean. Whereas the Soviet Naval force in the Ocean is of moderate combat strength, the United States Task Force, led by USS ENTERPRISE, was made up of major naval combatants, including the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, an amphibious assault carrier, a multi-product logistical support ship, and missile-equipped escort units.

This new-look policy was not initiated without advance notice. On 29 September 1971 Vice Admiral Maurice F. Weisner, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, said that the United States Seventh Fleet "would begin sending more ships into the Indian Ocean in response to a Soviet build-up there."<sup>66</sup> Admiral Weisner said that these ships would be organized as patrols rather than as permanent forces assigned to the Indian Ocean.

Following the outbreak of war between India and Pakistan, the United States Navy detailed this naval task force to the Bay

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<sup>65</sup>Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>66</sup>"More U.S. Warships Due in Indian Ocean," New York Times, 30 September 1971, p. 9.





of Bengal. "Its apparent mission was to stand by in case Americans had to be evacuated from either East or West Pakistan, to demonstrate that the Soviet Union was not the only big power with force in the area and perhaps to discourage India from any attempt to dismember West Pakistan."<sup>67</sup>

During this same time period the organizational structures of Navy command channels were rearranged, in order that the Seventh Fleet could have its "official area of responsibility extended to encompass the whole Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf area, previously split with the Atlantic Command."<sup>68</sup> The United States task force conducted routine operations in the Bay of Bengal, remaining free from any involvement in the Indo-Pakistan war.

The significance of the task force penetration into the Indian Ocean is far more than merely a naval reaction to the Indo-Pakistan war. Prior to the outbreak of war, there were indications that the United States was preparing to conduct periodic patrols using Seventh Fleet units in response to the Soviet Naval presence. The war provided an excellent pretext for introducing the carrier task force into the Ocean in order

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<sup>67</sup>William Beecher, "U.S. Move in Indian Ocean is Linked to Commitments," New York Times, 8 January 1972, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup>Tom Engelhardt, "A Calculated Gamble for Naval Power," Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 1974, p. 33.



to safeguard American lives. However, "the ENTERPRISE stayed in the Indian Ocean for more than three weeks after the cease-fire between India and Pakistan," Michael Mallory reports, "and the Pentagon spokesmen said one reason for its continued maneuvers was the navy's 'desire to gain operating experience in that area.'"<sup>69</sup> While official American foreign policy in the Ocean continued to promote a low-keyed presence, the ENTERPRISE task force signaled a change in policy.

John W. Finney reported on 7 January 1972 in the New York Times: "The Defense department said today that the Navy would conduct periodic operations in the Indian Ocean to help establish an American presence in a new area of strategic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union."<sup>70</sup> It appears that the continuing Vietnam conflict notwithstanding, the United States began to respond to the growing Soviet Naval presence in the Ocean, and that this new naval policy would be one which would encounter the least resistance of the Indian Ocean littoral. Although the littoral denounces any great power naval presence in the Ocean, an occasional task force patrol is much less objectionable than a permanently deployed

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<sup>69</sup>Michael T. Mallory, "New Act in an Old Game," Far Eastern Economic Review, 19 February 1972, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup>John W. Finney, "Indian Ocean Role is Planned by U.S.," New York Times, 7 January 1972, p. 1.



naval task force or a permanent United States base within the Indian Ocean.

It appears that the naval policy in the Indian Ocean during the waning years of United States Naval involvement in Vietnam would more actively address the Soviet Naval presence, but short of introducing a permanent task force here in addition to the Middle East Force. This is most easily and effectively accomplished by the occasional aircraft carrier task force patrols into the Indian Ocean.

William Beecher wrote in the 8 January 1972 New York Times: "Pentagon officials stressed today that plans to send United States warships more frequently into the Indian Ocean were announced several years ago but that their implementation had been deferred because of the Vietnam war."<sup>71</sup>

"Such deployments, the Pentagon officials argued, are consonant with the Nixon Doctrine's emphasis on having allies supply their own ground forces while the United States maintains powerful air and naval forces in Asia."<sup>72</sup>

The ENTERPRISE-led task force in the Indian Ocean in December 1971 might signal a new phase in American naval policy in the Ocean. Not only were periodic naval visits into the

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<sup>71</sup>William Beecher, "U.S. Move in Indian Ocean is Linked to Commitments," New York Times, 8 January 1972, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.





Indian Ocean projected by the Defense Department prior to the Indo-Pakistan war, but also they were supported during and after the war. The post-Vietnam policy would include the continuation of the Middle East Force at Bahrain and a renewed emphasis on periodic task force operations in the Indian Ocean.

At the time of the Indo-Pakistan war, the United States Navy obtained a semi-permanent naval station on the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. The United States assumed the rights that they had enjoyed when it was under British control. Department of Defense officials "emphasized that the agreement with Bahrain merely extended arrangements for use of the base that the United States had with Britain before she withdrew from the Persian Gulf and that it did not contain or imply any political or military commitments to Bahrain or any other nation in the area."<sup>73</sup> The Middle East Force would continue to be based at the Jufair Bay naval complex on Bahrain.

#### B. THE UNITED STATES NAVY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: PRESENT

The current United States naval policy has maintained the basic post-Vietnam approach in the Indian Ocean, with the Middle East Force stationed at Bahrain at a constant force level of three units, and periodic deployments of Seventh Fleet

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<sup>73</sup>Michael T. Mallory, "New Act in an Old Game," Far Eastern Economic Review, 19 February 1972, p. 21.





units into the area. Nonetheless, recent indicators have pointed toward a more active naval role in the Indian Ocean, one which would depart from the low-key approach generally pursued.

1. Diego Garcia

- a. Communications Facility

In 1966 Britain and the United States signed an agreement for "United States military use of Diego Garcia for the construction, at U.S. expense, of joint facilities consisting of 'communications and minimum necessary support facilities including an airstrip.'"<sup>74</sup>

In the spring of 1973 the United States Navy opened a communications station on Diego Garcia in the British owned Chagos Archipelago to help control the future movements of ships and aircraft through the Indian Ocean area. The communications station includes a radio station manned by approximately 300 Navy personnel, an 8,000-foot runway and a small harbor being dredged in the island's lagoon.

Electro-magnetic communications have been extremely poor in the western Indian Ocean. A communications facility at Diego Garcia would greatly enhance the command and control

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<sup>74</sup>James Laurie, "Diego Garcia: Expansion Plans," Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 1974, p. 32.



capability of U.S. Naval units operating in the Indian Ocean. However, this communications station represented a new, great power, land-based presence in the Indian Ocean. "But in keeping with the 'low-key' guideline laid down by the Defense Department for publicity about the Diego Garcia facility, no public announcement was made."<sup>75</sup>

The lack of publicity given to Diego Garcia has two underlying reasons. First, the littoral attitude toward great power presence in the Indian Ocean would not easily accept the United States Naval involvement on the island. "In view of these nations' concern that the Indian Ocean not be turned into a new region of strategic competition between the major powers, the Defense Department has emphasized that the Diego Garcia base would be a 'modest' communications facility, not portending a United States Navy build-up in the Ocean."<sup>76</sup> Secondly, the United States did not want to signal to the Soviet Union the beginning of a naval escalation between the two super-powers.

It is questionable that the Diego Garcia communications facility represents a significant departure from the low-key

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<sup>75</sup>John W. Finney, "U.S. Opens Small Post in Indian Ocean," New York Times, 18 June 1973, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.



U.S. presence in the Indian Ocean. United States Naval policy during this time included periodic patrols from the Seventh Fleet; the communications station here would enhance operational control of the visiting units. More importantly, the facility did not threaten Soviet Naval units in the Indian Ocean.

b. An Expanded Operating Facility

The ceasefire following the October, 1973, Arab-Israeli war included provisions for the re-opening of the Suez Canal. "The assumption of defense officials is that the Soviet Union will take advantage of a reopened canal to increase its naval presence in the Indian Ocean. The defense department is therefore looking ahead to establishing a counter-balancing naval force in an area that controls the sea lanes to Middle East Oil."<sup>77</sup>

It was reported in the New York Times on 22 January 1974 that: "Pentagon officials said today that preliminary discussions had already been held with the British Government about expanding the small naval station on the island so that it could support naval operations in the Indian Ocean."<sup>78</sup>

Prior to this new proposal for United States naval involvement in the Indian Ocean, the American Naval policy had

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<sup>77</sup>"U.S. Weighs Establishing Indian Ocean Naval Base," New York Times, 22 January 1974, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.





adhered to the general structure of a low-keyed presence and was in consonance with the broad guidelines of the Nixon Doctrine. Furthermore, this naval policy appeared to meet American security objectives and national interests in the Indian Ocean. The projection of a U.S. base in the Indian Ocean would greatly alter the existing political and military relationships between the United States and the littoral, and between the United States and the Soviet Union. This represents a substantial reorientation of foreign policy in the Ocean.

The 22 January New York Times article was supported by a 5 February 1974 announcement in the London Times by British Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Julian Amery, that a U.S. base was to be set up on Diego Garcia. Mr. Amery cited the Soviet naval presence as a major factor in the operating base. "The British Government had long felt that it was desirable in the general Western interest to balance increased Soviet activities in the Indian Ocean area."<sup>79</sup>

The proposed installation of Diego Garcia would be able to accommodate aircraft carriers as well as airplanes of the KC-135/Boeing 707 size. "Upgrading the base facilities involves increased fuel storage capacity, deepening the lagoon

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<sup>79</sup>"A U.S. Base in Indian Ocean to be Set Up on British Isle," New York Times, 6 February 1974, p. 4.



to provide anchorages for larger vessels, and improving the communications network."<sup>80</sup>

In order to mitigate the effect that the proposed base would have on the Indian Ocean littoral nations and the Soviet Union, "Defense and State Department officials have emphasized that even with the expansion, the base would be a modest supply installation designed to support intermittent naval operations in the Indian Ocean."<sup>81</sup> That this veiled attempt to reduce the strategic impact of the Diego Garcia base failed is given by Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh: "The Indian Government 'cannot escape the conclusion' that United States plans to expand naval and air facilities on Diego Garcia were 'connected with a more long-term presence of United States Naval forces in the area.'"<sup>82</sup>

The United States Senate, acting on the 1975 Military Construction Authorization bill, considered the request for 29 million dollars to improve the Diego Garcia facility. The Senate, while recognizing the advantages that such an operating base would give to the Navy, also recognized the foreign policy

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<sup>80</sup>James Laurie, "Diego Garcia: Expansion Plans," Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 1974, p. 32.

<sup>81</sup>John W. Finney, "Role of Indian Ocean Base is Discussed," New York Times, 13 March 1974, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup>"India Criticizes U.S. Move," New York Times, 13 March 1974, p. 3.



impact of the installation. The Senate Armed Services committee approved only half of the funds requested. "It said the 14.8 million was approved 'as a first increment in the Navy's requirements,' and noted that the committee had included a section in the bill precluding the spending of the funds until the President certifies that the construction is essential to the national interests."<sup>83</sup>

Although funds have not presently been authorized for the completion of the entire Diego Garcia improvement project as planned by the Navy, it has nevertheless served notice to the international community that the United States plans to raise its level of naval involvement in the Indian Ocean. Diego Garcia remains as a communications station and a base for naval reconnaissance aircraft, but it is viewed by the international community as a potential U.S. operating base.

## 2. United States Naval Units in the Indian Ocean

### a. Middle East Force

The Middle East Force has continued to operate from the former British base on the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. The force has continued to remain at a constant force level of three ships. In the fall of 1972 the aging flagship

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<sup>83</sup>Alan Jarvis, "Senate OK's Funds for Diego Garcia," Navy Times, 2 October 1974, p. 19.





was replaced by a newly converted amphibious landing ship (LPD), providing increased communications capabilities and greater space for supportive elements. The other two naval units are destroyers, rotated from the Atlantic Fleet for a tour in the Indian Ocean.

Owing to the non-combatant role of the flagship, and the limited offensive capabilities of the destroyers, the Middle East Force does not project a major naval force commitment in the Ocean. It primarily serves to show the flag throughout the littoral, as well as to assert the United States attitude that the Indian Ocean is not a closed sea.

The continuation of the American naval facility on Bahrain is not assured. "Last October 21 (1973) during the Arab-Israeli war, Bahrain's ruler Emir Issa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa ordered the United States MidEastFor out within one year."<sup>84</sup> Early in October, 1974, however, it was reported that Bahrain reversed its decision to expel the Navy. "Bahrain's high regard for the symbolic value of its ties to the United States, the American peace effort in the Middle East and Saudi Arabian support for an American military presence in the Persian Gulf are evidently the chief factors in the Bahraini decision."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>"U.S. Navy to Stay in Bahrain," Monterey Peninsula Herald, 4 October 1974, p. 16.

<sup>85</sup>"Navy Allowed to Stay Despite Time Limit," Monterey Peninsula Herald, 21 October 1974, p. 18.





Bahrain's close ties with the major oil-producing Arab nations places the future of the naval base in Jufair Bay in considerable doubt.

b. Periodic Visits to the Indian Ocean

Subsequent to the ENTERPRISE Task Force into the Indian Ocean of November, 1971, United States Seventh Fleet units have been occasionally deployed in that area. During the crisis of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the United States dispatched an aircraft carrier task force, led by the aircraft carrier HANCOCK, into the Indian Ocean. This U.S. Naval reaction to a Middle East conflict has added another dimension to the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean. The volatility of the Arab-Israeli question, coupled with the Western world's dependence on Arab-held crude oil, places great significance on this area. That a naval reaction to the 1973 hostilities was made in the Indian Ocean ushers in a two-ocean front for the entire Middle Eastern area. As a matter of U.S. Naval policy, however, most naval deployments to the area provide the navy with operating experience in the Ocean, and are not a reaction to a crisis. Short of stationing a permanent naval task force in the Ocean, this current U.S. Naval policy will continue the periodic visits.



### C. UNITED STATES NAVAL OBJECTIVES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The United States Naval objectives for the 1970's in the Indian Ocean are not clearly defined. It is certain, however, that one major aspect of American foreign policy in the Ocean is in response to the Soviet Naval presence in the area. There is a recurrent theme in virtually all the literature and periodicals on this subject: a United States response to the Soviet Naval presence in the Indian Ocean. United States interests here are not limited to the Soviet Naval presence. The economic and political interests among the littoral nations must not be neglected. Economic interests are of significant importance. A great many Western-allied nations are vitally dependent upon the Indian Ocean, both as a trade base with littoral nations, and as an ocean highway to transport necessary raw materials and finished products. It is unlikely that any littoral nation has a navy strong enough to threaten the economic transactions in the Ocean. Rather, the chief potential threat to economic activity in the area is the Soviet Union's Naval forces. Therefore, the United States Naval objectives in the Indian Ocean, while not slighting the economic and political interests, will be examined with respect to the Soviet Naval presence.

Beyond the question of a United States Naval response to the Soviet Naval presence in the Ocean are the ramifications



of one power's response to the activities of the other. Any change in the status quo by one side would be subject to a possible response from the other. The consequences of a naval arms race in the area by the two great powers must be understood to properly view the various naval objectives.

#### 1. Soviet Naval Threat in the Indian Ocean

An assessment of the Soviet Naval threat in the Indian Ocean requires some insight into the intentions of Soviet leaders. Whereas these intentions cannot be directly examined, one can use empirical data to establish a perception of what these intentions might be. In the case of the Soviet Union, the objectives stated by the Soviet leaders are analyzed in terms of the capability to achieve those objectives. Where the capability is far stronger than the objectives might call for, one might interpret an objective based upon the capability rather than the stated objective. This latter phenomena is sometimes called worst-case planning.

Former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, is a strong supporter of an American response to the Soviet Naval presence in the Ocean. Admiral Zumwalt felt that "Soviet tentacles are going out like an octopus into the Indian Ocean."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>James Laurie, "The Hardware for Potential Confrontation," Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 May 1974, p. 31.





The naval capabilities of the deployed Soviet force in the Indian Ocean, coupled with the littoral support potential, provide the Soviets with a stronger naval force than that of the United States. This Soviet naval force must be analyzed in terms of threat, however. Whereas American military planners believe that the threat is credible and real, others recognize a more moderate threat.

The growth of the Soviet Naval presence in the Indian Ocean is a part of a worldwide expansion in deployments and missions of the Soviet Navy. The force that is now being maintained in the Ocean does not have the capability to disrupt sea lanes of communications, or threaten littoral nations. Rather, it emphasizes the political influence and presence roles of the Soviet Union within the Ocean. Nonetheless, the current worldwide posture of the Soviet Navy, as opposed to the early 1960's when the Soviets still promoted a coastal-defense oriented force, is indicative of the changing emphasis for the navy.

Whether or not a viable naval threat by the Soviet Union actually exists in the Indian Ocean is of much less importance than what American policy planners perceive the extent of the threat to be. The Soviet Navy is in the Indian Ocean. The naval units do possess a credible threat capability. Soviet Union and Indian Ocean regional analysts must determine intentions, but since a credible capability exists, the intentions



are attributed to the military capabilities and potential of the naval units. American policy planners, therefore, must address the threat capability possessed by Soviet Naval units in the Indian Ocean, rather than relying on stated Soviet objectives.

## 2. United States-Soviet Naval Escalation

A military arms build-up by two great powers in the Indian Ocean is feared by littoral nations, and forms the basis for their objection to great power navies in the Ocean. This has been recognized by the United States and the Soviet Union, but it appears neither is willing to offer major concessions to the other. The London Times reported in February, 1972, that: "The United States has approached the Soviet Union about the possibility of an agreement to restrain the American and Russian military presence in the Indian Ocean."<sup>87</sup>

Admiral Zumwalt, when questioned about the possibility of a naval race in the Indian Ocean if the United States established a base at Diego Garcia, reported that: "Expansion of the Diego Garcia facility would not set off a naval race in the Indian Ocean since the Soviet Union was already 'on the

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<sup>87</sup>"Move to Limit US-Soviet Forces in Indian Ocean," London Times, 2 February 1972, p. 1.



move' in the region and expanding its naval presence."<sup>88</sup> It is apparent that the former Chief of Naval Operations believed that the Soviets were expanding their naval capabilities in the area independent of United States naval activities. An opposing viewpoint was presented by the United Nations in a report on big-power activities in the Indian Ocean. "The plans to convert Britain's island of Diego Garcia into a United States naval base were almost certain to prompt the Soviet Union to seek similar facilities and so spur another arms race."<sup>89</sup>

The report continued, "The instabilities inherent in the Indian Ocean area will not easily permit a mutual balance to be maintained successfully by the two great powers over a period of time. And the chances of great-power rivalry interacting with local conflicts, and then escalating, are high."<sup>90</sup>

There exists a potential for Soviet-United States naval escalation as long as both nations maintain a naval force of any size in the Indian Ocean. The arms race can be mitigated by one side unilaterally restraining its force levels independent of the opposite side, or by mutual and realistic agreement by

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<sup>88</sup>John W. Finney, "Zumwalt Backs U.S. Plans for Indian Ocean Base," New York Times, 21 March 1974, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup>Kathleen Teltsch, "U.N. Study Draws Broad Protest," New York Times, 25 May 1974, p. 7.

<sup>90</sup>"Arms Race Seen in Indian Ocean," New York Times, 12 May 1974, p. 5.





both sides to restrict naval build-ups. Of these two options, the former undermines military preparedness in the area, while the latter presumes a relationship of trust and similarity of purpose. Although an arms race has not yet developed in the Indian Ocean, current trends in both United States and Soviet Union Naval policies in the Indian Ocean can lead to a great power naval escalation, and the potential for armed conflict between the great powers.

#### D. THE UNITED STATES NAVY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: THE FUTURE

Future American foreign policy in the Indian Ocean derives its content from the American perception of its national interests. Specifically, the United States perception of national interests must address not only the Soviet Naval presence in the Ocean, but also the relations between the United States and the littoral nations. The options for United States Naval policy range from a complete withdrawal of U.S. Naval units on one end, to a permanent carrier task group stationed in the Ocean on the other. While it would be difficult to interpret American national interests in the long term, the near-future interests can be extrapolated from existing trends.

In the near-future one can project no major departure from present naval policy in the Indian Ocean. The Middle East Force is expected to continue its operations on Bahrain, unless a





situation similar to that of the Arab sentiment during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war forces Bahrain to expel U.S. naval forces. The periodic visits of U.S. Naval units into the Ocean will also probably continue at their present level. Moreover, the projected naval base on Diego Garcia could be used as either a base from which a carrier task force might be permanently stationed, or as an outpost support facility where visiting naval ships could perform limited maintenance and receive limited logistical support.

At present, the future of the United States Naval involvement in Diego Garcia is unknown. The plans to convert Diego Garcia into an operating base have met with considerable opposition, both from within this country and outside. The proposed naval base would provide otherwise non-existent land-based logistic and support facilities. The argument is undisputed that the Diego Garcia base would be invaluable to a task force operating in the Indian Ocean. However, the disadvantages weigh heavily. The littoral is firmly opposed to the base. Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Indonesia have warned that it is a bad idea. Former ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, writes: "If we intend to frighten the Russians, or others out of the Indian Ocean it is a laughable gesture. If we intend to demonstrate our continued interest in Asia by setting up shop on Asian 'turf' we should think hard about our past experience



in such Asian ventures."<sup>91</sup> United States policy planners will weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the Diego Garcia operating base, and ensure that this specific foreign policy is consistent with United States national interests in the Indian Ocean.

#### E. THE KRA CANAL AND THE SEVENTH FLEET

United States Seventh Fleet naval units are being used by the Navy to make periodic visits in the Indian Ocean. Aircraft carrier task groups have recently operated in the Persian Gulf as well as throughout the Ocean. The Malacca Straits are being used as the access route through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier. A canal through the Isthmus of Kra with free access granted to U.S. combatant and logistic units would reduce transit distances and facilitate logistic support to units operating in the Indian Ocean.

##### 1. Transit Distances

The approximate distance from Manila, Philippine Islands, to Calcutta, India, through the Malacca Straits is 2,979 nautical miles. Transit distance through the Kra Canal is approximately 700 nautical miles less. Comparable reduction in transit distances from locations other than Manila, such as

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<sup>91</sup>Chester Bowles, "A Considerable Speck," New York Times, 13 May 1974, p. 31.



Japan or Guam, can be expected. Similarly, the savings in distance applies to other locations within the Indian Ocean.

Whereas the reduction in transit distance was significant in the time of sailing ships or early steam-powered vessels, the Navy of today is capable of sustained transit speeds of twenty knots. Translated into time-savings, approximately thirty-five hours could be eliminated by use of the Kra Canal, provided no excess trans-canal time is encountered in the canal transit.

For access to the Indian Ocean through the Barrier by Seventh Fleet units for routine operations, a transit time reduction of thirty-five hours is insignificant. However, if a crisis situation were to quickly develop, this time savings could acquire increasing importance. The time and distance saved by using the proposed Kra Canal could be of some benefit to Seventh Fleet units only if an immediate response to events in the Indian Ocean is imperative for the security of U.S. national interests.

An additional consideration of the Kra Canal is necessary if the Indonesia-Malaysia claim to territorial waters of the Malacca Straits is realized and passage is restricted for foreign warships. In this case, units traveling from the Seventh Fleet to the Indian Ocean by way of the Timor Sea north of Australia would have to travel an additional three thousand miles. This





prohibitively time-consuming route would be unacceptable if a rapid response were required of Seventh Fleet units to the Indian Ocean.

In the event that all passages through the Barrier were blocked through hostile action, the route north of Australia would be the only alternative for Seventh Fleet units to deploy into the Indian Ocean. In this case, a crisis situation in the Ocean requiring U.S. Naval forces would by default be the responsibility of the Middle East Force.

## 2. Logistical Support

A major problem for a task force operating in the Indian Ocean is the vital requirement for logistic support. Until every naval ship is operating on nuclear power, the primary logistic requirement will be petroleum, oil and lubricants. Fuel for ship and aircraft propulsion is consumed in huge quantities during aircraft launch-recovery operations and anti-submarine patrols. To a lesser extent repair-parts support and consumable-provisions replenishment is necessary for longer-term, continuous operations in an area. It is primarily for these reasons, together with the necessity to conduct required ship maintenance, that the centrally located operating base at Diego Garcia is being sought.

Without any logistic support from within the Indian Ocean littoral, necessary logistic products would have to be



provided by the Pacific Fleet through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier, or by the Atlantic Fleet through Suez, if and when opened. Support from the east is preferable owing to its superior geographic proximity to the Indian Ocean.

In past aircraft carrier task force operations in the Indian Ocean, multi-product logistic support ships occasionally would accompany the task force. This was especially evident when the ENTERPRISE task force responded to the Indo-Pakistan war in December, 1971, and in October, 1973, when the HANCOCK task force reacted to the Arab-Israeli war.

United States naval underway replenishment units have dramatically improved since the Second World War. Older units dedicated to carrying a single product, such as fuel oil and lubricants, or ammunition, or dry and perishable provisions, have been replaced by twenty-knot ships with the capability of carrying a variety of logistic products. These new replenishment ships are capable of supporting an aircraft carrier task force for an extended period, the length depending upon the nature of the operations being conducted and the units involved.

Additional replenishment ships, if required by the operating force in the Indian Ocean, could save approximately thirty-five hours in transit time between Subic Bay and the Indian Ocean if they were to use the Kra Canal. During peacetime operations in the Indian Ocean this reduction in transit



time is not of great importance. However, if the transit routes through the Barrier were closed to U.S. Naval units, the logistic ships would be forced to reach the Indian Ocean by way of northern Australia. In order to adequately re-supply a task force in the Ocean, on an extended basis, a large number of support ships would be involved so that the proper interval of re-supply could be maintained despite the long transit distance.

In a time of crisis in the Indian Ocean, where U.S. naval units would have to conduct extended naval operations in the area, the Kra Canal could give the United States a logistic advantage. Assuming that a multi-product support ship would accompany the task force into the ocean, as in the case of the Indo-Pakistan and Arab-Israeli wars, the continuing logistic support problem is allowed extra time to become organized. The number of additional logistic support ships that would be required would depend upon the round-trip transit time for these units from Subic Bay to the task force operating area, and the logistic requirements of the force. A savings of thirty-five hours in each direction if the Kra Isthmus Canal were used could be realized. The impact of this time savings can be assayed only in the context of a specific operational problem in a specific area of the Indian Ocean.





## F. SUMMARY

The United States Naval policy in the Indian Ocean is strongly oriented toward the Soviet Naval presence in the Ocean. This leads to a contradiction, however, because the littoral states do not want great power forces in the Ocean. American Naval policy in the past concentrated on a low-keyed naval presence in the Indian Ocean. In the late 1960's, however, the military environment within the Ocean had experienced a significant change. The heretofore dominant British forces were being withdrawn, and the Soviet Union began naval deployments into the Ocean. Furthermore, the United States was heavily engaged in Vietnam.

As the naval commitment in Vietnam ebbed in the early 1970's, the United States could devote more naval resources to the Indian Ocean. Aircraft carrier task forces began making periodic patrols into the Ocean, and a communications station was established on Diego Garcia. United States involvement continued with the decision to expand the Diego Garcia facility into a regular operating base to provide logistical and maintenance support to deployed units into the Indian Ocean.

These recent United States Naval developments in this area appear to represent an escalation of U.S. efforts. Not only does a U.S. Naval escalation challenge the Soviet Union in the





Indian Ocean, but also the littoral nations who strongly oppose great power navies in the Indian Ocean. Future U.S. Naval policies with respect to the Indian Ocean must consider the effects these policies will have on both the Soviet Union and also the littoral nations.

The Soviet Union possesses a threat potential in the Indian Ocean. While their deployed forces in the Ocean are not of overpowering strength, they have established considerable support from within the littoral, and have a far greater internal Indian Ocean support capability. Moreover, the expanding role of the Soviet Navy in foreign policy portends an eventual increasing Soviet Naval presence in the Ocean. Nevertheless, at this time and in the near future, while recognizing the threat potential of the Soviet Navy, the Soviet Naval activity does not imply that a commensurate U.S. Naval response is necessary. The informal reconnaissance network coupled with satellite sensors can monitor Soviet surface ship activity within the Ocean. A Soviet Naval buildup could be detected, and a response from Seventh Fleet units could be initiated. A crisis situation within the littoral could also prompt a U.S. response, balancing the naval presence of the Soviets.

As herein described, the assumed national interests are not influencing present U.S. Naval objectives in the Indian Ocean. The presence of the Soviet Navy in the Ocean notwithstanding,



the assumed national interests can best be pursued with the Middle East Force and the augmentation capability of Seventh Fleet naval units, without a permanent U.S. Naval buildup. That effect that the Kra Canal would have on such an augmentation capability will be analyzed in the conclusion.

Future naval policies in the Indian Ocean will reflect the United States perception of its national interests in the area. This paper is presenting a national interest approach which would cause a change in naval policy, a change that could be politically acceptable to the littoral and militarily acceptable by the Soviet Union, while at the same time not jeopardizing United States national security.



## V. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Foreign policies which are pursued in specific geographic areas will necessarily interact with the existing political attitudes and policies of the nations within the area. These political attitudes and policies must be understood before one undertakes the process of examining specific foreign policies in the political context of the geographic area. This chapter will explore the political attitudes of the Indian Ocean littoral with respect to the environment in which American foreign policy will come into contact.

Indian Ocean area nations have a strong historical background of colonialism. That this colonialism was present until the late 1940's has had a significant influence on the littoral's present political attitudes. Colonialism has been replaced by nationalism in many areas, with an emphasis on independence from the great powers. This political orientation is reflected in the position that the majority of littoral nations have taken on the presence of great power activity within the Indian Ocean. While the area nations do not want the intrusion of outside great power nations, there is a strong potential for one of their own to achieve great-power status. India continues to display political and military





strength, and appears to be the dominant nation among the littoral. One must be cautious, however, of the growing military capabilities of the Arab nations, and the impact they might have on restraining India's potential dominance of the littoral.

This chapter will not be an exhaustive examination of all littoral nations and their political attitudes toward great power naval presence in the Indian Ocean. India, as the most consistent and strongest proponent of an Indian Ocean zone of peace, will be studied in some depth. Other littoral nations, influential in foreign policy and relative military strength, will be examined in lesser detail.

Two basic concepts will be frequently used: "nonalignment" and "zone of peace." The nonalignment concept differs from zone of peace, or neutrality of the Indian Ocean, in that the former is in reference to outside power commitments or alliances with a littoral nation, while the latter proposes the absence of foreign warships in the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean is unique in that it does not have an established great-power on its shores. The absence of any great power, coupled with the littoral attitude of maintaining a zone of peace in the Ocean, are strong factors which make up the littoral attitude to foreign naval presence. India views itself as the dominant littoral power. Their attitude



towards a foreign naval presence in the Indian Ocean does not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the other littoral nations, nor does it direct the attitudes of these states.

## A. INDIA

### 1. Colonialism

The history of India before the Western colonial expeditions appeared in the Indian sub-continent was rich in provincial rivalries and religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. By the 17th century the Europeans had firmly ensconced themselves in the Indian Ocean area. In 1640, the English East India Company established itself in Madras, India. Other European colonial nations accompanied the British into the ocean area, including the Dutch, Danes, and French. During the eighteenth century there was considerable British-French rivalry in South India for dominance of the area.

The English East India Company would be the vehicle through which the British would gain control of the Indian sub-continent. By the end of the eighteenth century the British had occupied most higher level administrative positions, and the Indian Army Officer corps was entirely British. "Indians thought it natural for a large number of offices to go to the British, but they were irked by their own total exclusion. They actively resented the excuse later put forward that it



was on grounds of inefficiency. This was a sore point in Indo-British relations into the twentieth century."<sup>92</sup> It is in this era of the beginnings of British colonialism in India that the present Indian attitude towards nonalignment and great power presence was founded.

It can be effectively argued that the Indian attitudes of today with respect to great power presence in the Indian Ocean area, and the policy of nonalignment, was strongly affected by the British colonial rule up to 1947. The British Empire did not promote national identity and development, for these attitudes, if sufficiently strong, could enable a colony to break away from the empire. Moreover, the relationships between the British and the colonies were not such to encourage technological achievement or cultural improvement, but rather a relationship strongly based on economic exploitation.

The penetration of Western cultural thought and practices into the predominantly Hindu-Muslim oriented culture further eroded the national identity of India. Although the British made significant improvements in many facets of Indian life, there was little regard for the preservation of Indian customs and institutions. Indian nationalism was rooted in this British colonial era, and gathered strength over the period of

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<sup>92</sup>Percival Spear, India (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 205.





British colonial rule. Anil Seal, in his book The Emergence of Indian Nationalism, supports this principle. "Although British rule sharpened the competitive conditions in which they grew, the nationalist movements in India were not the creation of nationalism. Their development was so leisurely that the search for their genesis might be pushed back to the early decades of the nineteenth century."<sup>93</sup>

The consummate effort of the Indian nationalism was the independence of the Indian sub-continent from British rule in 1947. While the nationalist movements were slowly maturing during the term of British colonial rule, these movements of themselves did not solely bring about India's independence. "The United Kingdom, emerging greatly weakened from World War Two, was under mounting pressure from nationalists in India and elsewhere. Leaders of the Labor government, who had long supported Indian aspirations for self-government, decided it was no longer feasible or desirable to rule India."<sup>94</sup>

The Indian nationalism movement was capped by India's independence from Great Britain. Attitudes of national identity and independence do not in themselves shape the foreign policies

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<sup>93</sup>Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism (Cambridge: The University Press, 1968), p. 22.

<sup>94</sup>William J. Barnds, India, Pakistan, and the Great Powers (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 3.





that will be part of India's international relations. British colonialism left a "bitter-sweet" taste in Indian thought. British rule in India did a great deal of good for India. The security of India's northern borders was adroitly maintained by the British. Political institutions were introduced which greatly enhanced internal political stability. Notable technological advances were achieved, especially in the area of manufacturing of export products and exploitation of raw materials for export. Nonetheless, the bitterness of British rule over the Indian sub-continent and the suppression of India's national identity strongly influenced India's political attitudes toward nonalignment and neutralization of the Indian Ocean.

## 2. Nonalignment

"Free India's nonalignment, a phenomenon distinct from isolationism, non-commitment, neutrality, neutralization, unilateralism and non-involvement, is a course of foreign policy arising from the attitude of non-acquiescence in the bi-polarization of world politics. The bi-polarization of world politics, crystallizing in the cold war, has become as clear as it is today only after the Second World War. But its process, remaining largely under-current, was at work following the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 until after the end of the Second World War.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Deva Narayan Mallik, The Development of Non-Alignment in India's Foreign Policy (Allahabad: Chaitanya Publishing House, 1967), p. 1.



India's policy of nonalignment began soon after they had gained their independence. Their attitudes toward the bi-polar, superpower-dominated cold war of the early 1950's was viewed in the context of their past history of colonialism. "The cold war means to the West a struggle for the survival of a certain way of life; to India it means a most inconsistent and exasperating insistence on the settling of Western problems on other people's soil."<sup>96</sup> The policy of nonalignment was not then directed at a foreign military presence in the Indian Ocean. Rather, it was an open pronouncement to both the Soviet Union and the United States that India would maintain its own international identity and pursue its own foreign policy objectives.

The British, meanwhile, were gradually reducing their military assets east of Suez, and thus their ability to exert substantial influence in this area. There was no move by the great power navies to establish a naval presence in the once British-dominated Indian Ocean. India had to contend with the great powers in various other ways however, involving political alignments during the time period. The Indian Ocean could remain a zone of peace, not because India successfully kept foreign navies out, but rather because the foreign navies did not wish to operate there.

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<sup>96</sup>Barnds, op. cit., p. 63



India's foreign policies following independence were largely constructed on the framework built by Jawarharlal Nehru in the mid-twentieth century. "India's foreign policy attracted worldwide attention, mainly because a large and important country was developing a policy independent of the two power blocs then forming."<sup>97</sup> Nehru felt his most important task following independence was that of nation building. This involved considerably more than technological advancement and economic growth. Nehru faced the challenge of nation building in a post war world of bi-polarization, a condition which he felt was not conducive to the tasks at hand.

"Unless there was peace in the world, the task of nation-building, difficult in the best of circumstances, would be impossible. 'Without peace,' Nehru said, 'all our dreams are vanished and reduced to ashes.' The desire for world peace was no Indian monopoly, though India's spokesmen at times seemed to suggest this. They took the position, however, that there was a basic difference between their policy and that of most other powers, especially those aligned on either side in the cold war. Power politics was the cause of wars, Nehru held, and continued reliance on this unsavory and discredited method could lead the world into another and more terrible war. India would refuse to play the game, and would not join either block."<sup>98</sup>

The concepts of nonalignment, nurtured during the 30 years preceeding independence, emerged as a keystone of Free India's foreign policy. These concepts would maturate and

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 49.





solidify into reality in the years following independence.

The policy of nonalignment has been severely tested and greatly stretched, but it has retained a prominent place in India's foreign policy of today.

### 3. A Zone of Peace

India's foreign policy in the Indian Ocean reflects the Indian leaders' perceived national interests. The concept of nonalignment, if rigorously followed, would encourage a political environment favorable to India's pursuit of national identity and purpose. It is difficult, however, to disentangle those aspects of foreign policy which are derived from non-alignment, and those which are the results of India's aspirations to dominate the littoral. Whatever their origin, both the elements of nonalignment and littoral dominance have a common goal--that of maintaining the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, free from the presence of great power navies.

India's quest to maintain a zone of peace in the Ocean was in large part supported by the presence of the British navy in the Indian Ocean. As the British began reducing their commitments east of Suez in the late 1960's, and during the twenty-year period following India's independence when the British reduced their naval forces in this area to virtually nothing, a naval vacuum developed. The great powers following the War did not immediately seek to fill this vacuum.



Although neither great power introduced a substantial naval presence in the Indian Ocean, they each had separate reasons. The United States had a large naval capability following India's independence, but did not attach a high priority to U.S. national interests in the Ocean. The Soviet Union's naval strength after the Second World War was small and coastal-defense oriented. It did not have the capability for out-of-area deployments.

1968 was a pivotal year in the naval history of the Indian Ocean, when the Soviet Navy conducted their first deployment into the Ocean. "The initial deployment was from 22 March to 15 July 1968. A detachment from the Pacific Fleet comprising a Sverdlov, a Kashin, and a Krupnyj, together with tankers entered the Indian Ocean on 22 March."<sup>99</sup> The Soviet force visited the following ports: Madras, Bombay, Mogadishu, Umm Qasr, Basra, Karachi, Bandar Abbas, Berenice, Aden, and Colombo.<sup>100</sup>

The Soviet deployment was a significant step in the naval relationship of the Indian Ocean forces. The major combatants included a cruiser and two relatively modern destroyers.

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<sup>99</sup>Michael McGuire, ed., Soviet Naval Developments (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 425.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.



This naval force, far from the coastal waters of the Soviet homeland, received wide exposure in the littoral. Not only can this first Soviet deployment be viewed as a show of the flag, but also as a show to the littoral the new nature of Soviet naval technology and their capability to undertake extended out-of-area operations.

There are indications that the Indians received some advanced notice of the Soviet naval actions. Admiral Gorshkov, the military leader of the Soviet Navy, made his first visit to India in February 1968. Then, on 3 March 1968 it was announced that the Indian Navy would be in complete charge of the Indian Ocean after the final withdrawal of the British fleet in 1971. "Most of the new equipment is expected to come from the Soviet Union, whose naval chief, Admiral Gorshkov, visited Indian naval establishments last month."<sup>101</sup>

India's acceptance of naval assistance from the Soviet Union did not mean that India would be receptive to a Soviet naval presence in return, which was apparently forthcoming. At the 1968 meeting of the Supreme Soviet, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, is quoted as follows:

"Equal rights at all sectors and in all spheres of activity in the international arena, including the adoption of measures to protect the vital interests of the Soviet Union, its allies and friends; no discrimination in world

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<sup>101</sup>London Times, March 4, 1968, p. 5.





trade; extensive exchange of scientific, technological and cultural values; freedom of navigation for our ships and fleets, and no less than for the ships and fleets of any other power--all this determines our possibility and responsibility in world affairs."<sup>102</sup>

This speech to the Supreme Soviet, Admiral Gorshkov's visit to India, and the Soviet naval deployment into the Indian Ocean project a new Soviet foreign policy emphasis, one which potentially challenges the Indian concept of an Indian Ocean free from a great power presence.

Yet, India has been firmly intent on maintaining this apparent dichotomous foreign policy. For example, in November, 1970, India informed the United States, Russia, and Britain, that "she would oppose any attempts by the big powers to establish naval bases in the Indian Ocean. This would apparently stop rumors that India might give the Soviet Union a naval base in the Andaman Islands."<sup>103</sup>

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, visited the Soviet Union in September 1971. "Mrs Gandhi was stated to have reiterated that 'the area of the Indian Ocean must be a zone of peace.' The fact that the Soviet side was not

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<sup>102</sup>James M. McConnell, "The Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean," Soviet Naval Developments, ed. by Michael McGuire (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 425.

<sup>103</sup>Peter Hazelhurst, "India Warns Powers on Naval Base," London Times, 20 November 1970, p. 8.





specifically associated with this declaration suggests that there was some disagreement over the question of a Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean."<sup>104</sup> A few months later, Mrs. Gandhi stated India's foreign policy as "firmly based on the principle of nonalignment, despite the Indian-Soviet friendship treaty of last year."<sup>105</sup> Mrs. Gandhi elaborated on the aspects of military assistance from the Soviet Union and nonalignment as follows: "Asked if her country felt 'obligated to demonstrate its gratitude in any tangible way' to Moscow, which strongly supported India during the war with Pakistan, she observed first that India was not given 'to display gratitude in any tangible sense for anything.'"<sup>106</sup> In this same newspaper article, Mrs. Gandhi stated that, while she hoped the Indian Ocean region could be kept free of great power naval rivalry, she could offer no ideas about how this could be accomplished.

Late in 1973, India and the Soviet Union concluded another friendship treaty and a long term economic agreement. "In a spirited defense of her involvement with Moscow, Mrs. Gandhi said that recent agreements between the two nations did

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<sup>104</sup>David Bonavia, "Mrs. Gandhi and Soviet Leaders Fail to Agree," London Times, 30 September 1971, p. 6.

<sup>105</sup>C. L. Sulzberger, New York Times, 17 February 1972, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.



not influence her declared policy of independent judgments, assessments, decisions and actions!"<sup>107</sup>

The consistency of India's foreign policy since independence strongly supports India's desire for nonalignment and maintenance of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean. This consistency must be viewed cautiously, however, because there can be a wide divergence between what a country says, and that which it actually does. Although it is undocumented, one must question the apparent one-way nature of aid and support given to India, by both the United States and the Soviet Union. It seems intuitively unlikely that the Soviets would do something for nothing; and one wonders that at a propitious moment, or during a time of military necessity, the Soviets would move to seek naval bases or support facilities in the Indian sub-continent.

#### B. THE LITTORAL AND NONALIGNMENT-ZONE OF PEACE

A review of the littoral states and their attitudes on nonalignment and a zone of peace within the Indian Ocean will augment India's strong attitudes on these subjects. The entire littoral is not unified in support of the Indian position. Furthermore, some area nations carry stronger influence than

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<sup>107</sup> New York Times, 1 January 1974, p. 1.



others, thereby adding importance to their position. In order to develop the general littoral political attitude on nonalignment, a selected number of nations will be presented.

Two groups of nations exist which have followed a general policy of zone of peace within the Indian Ocean. Malaysia, Thailand, The Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore are joined together in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. A second group of littoral nations met in Lusaka, at a conference of Nonaligned nations. Meeting at Lusaka were the Western Indian Ocean islands, including Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and the British Indian Ocean Territory. Both of these littoral groups support a zone of peace within the Indian Ocean.

The African littoral nations are generally weaker in political and military strength than other littoral nations, but "on the whole, the Black African governments have welcomed the idea of a 'neutralized' Indian Ocean."<sup>108</sup> These African nations are the potential scene of great confrontations between the United States, Soviet Union, and China, as these slowly-developing nations advance their national identity and pursue possible conflicting ideologies. However, their expressed interests include a zone of peace and stability within the area.

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<sup>108</sup>Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, eds., The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. xxii.





On the Indian subcontinent, in agreement with India, are Pakistan and Sir Lanka (formerly Ceylon). The South Asian nations gave strong support to a resolution by the Conference of Nonaligned nations, wherein all states agreed to "consider and respect the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace from which Great Power rivalries and competition as well as bases conceived in such rivalries are excluded."<sup>109</sup>

Prime Minister Bandaranaike of Sir Lanka states: "Our concept of a Peace Zone totally excludes the intrusion of great power conflicts into the region, with their attendant defense systems."<sup>110</sup> A Pakistani spokesman, speaking in agreement, remarked: "The demand of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean that the Cold War and military rivalry between the Great Powers should not be injected into this area must be respected."<sup>111</sup>

Several littoral nations require a more detailed examination of their political attitudes. Owing to their relative naval strength and political status, Iran, Australia, Indonesia, and South Africa will be evaluated in the following sub-sections.

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<sup>109</sup>Norman D. Palmer, "South Asia and the Indian Ocean," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 243.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.



## 1. Iran

Of those nations in the Middle East who have utilized their oil resource revenues to build up national military strength, Iran appears the strongest and most capable. Not only is Iran buying the latest American weapon systems, but also utilizing American training facilities in order to upgrade the professional caliber of its military forces. It is unlikely, however, to assume that Iran can buy its way into great power status. Iran's present position rests on its vast resources of crude oil. It does not possess a large land mass nor population base. The large oil resources notwithstanding, Iran does not possess a sufficient area and population base to firmly establish itself as a great power. An overriding dependence on a single natural resource to maintain an international position of strength and prestige is insecure at best. Many international circumstances could arise which would relegate crude petroleum products to second rate significance, and therefore undermine Iran's strength.

Iran's economy is heavily dependent upon the export of crude oil through the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Pursuing a policy of Iranian naval strength in the Persian Gulf, Iran seeks to establish itself as the dominant naval power in the Gulf. However, there seems to be no such intention for the Indian Ocean. "It is illuminating to contrast this constant



Iranian insistence on hegemony in the Persian Gulf with the relative lack of statements about the Indian Ocean."<sup>112</sup>

According to R. M. Burrell:

"...the Iranian government has come to the realistic conclusion that the problems of oil traffic in the Indian Ocean are over-whelmingly the concern of the Western powers and that, although Iran as the world's largest oil exporter has a vital interest in such matters, the defense of those routes is presently beyond Iran's capabilities. The emphasis is centered on the Gulf, and there Iran feels itself to be prepared for, and capable of, the maintenance of security and free navigation."<sup>113</sup>

As for the Indian Ocean, Iran has assumed the position that the powers interested in open lines of communication throughout the Indian Ocean can provide such security without Iranian interference.

## 2. Australia

Australia's national interests clearly include the maintenance of the lanes of communication throughout the Indian Ocean. During the era when the British were dominant in the Ocean, Australia, like India, had little concern for the defense of the area. However, the British decision to conclude its long-standing presence east of Suez in 1970 created a new security problem for the Australians.

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<sup>112</sup>R.M. Burrell, "The Indian Ocean: An Iranian Evaluation," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 95.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 96.





Threats to sea lanes of communication within the Indian Ocean are not likely to be based in the littoral countries. "None of the nations bordering the Indian Ocean has either a navy or a merchant navy of any size. India, Indonesia, and Australia have navies of approximately equal ship strength, Indonesia's being in a state of considerable disrepair. South Africa is the only other state with a naval capacity. No one nation in the region dominates the Ocean or makes a disproportionate use of it."<sup>114</sup> Consequently a threat to the security of the Indian Ocean would have to come from an outside naval power directly, or a great power in support of a littoral nation.

A foreign policy which follows a zone of peace, or "neutralization," of the Indian Ocean would seek to eliminate a naval power from threatening the security of the area. Australia re-evaluated its political position following the Soviet naval entry into the Indian Ocean in 1968. In 1973 the Australian government modified the 1963 Australian-American agreement on naval communications in installations on the Northwest Cape of Australia. The Australians wanted to assume a greater operational control over the facility. This modification to the operational control of the joint communications

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<sup>114</sup>T.B. Miller, "Geopolitics and Military/Strategic Potential," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 63.





base closely followed a communique covering talks between Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlan and India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The two countries pledged "to work for the creation of a 'zone of peace' in the Indian Ocean 'free from international tensions, great power rivalry, and military escalation.'"115

In opposition to a proposed British-American agreement to build up military facilities on the island of Diego Garcia in 1974, Australia reiterated its foreign policy position in the Indian Ocean. "Australia is a member of, and has given its firm support to, the United Nations ad hoc committee on the Indian Ocean zone of peace and has endorsed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations proposal for a neutrality in the ASEAN region."116

The position that they have taken on nonalignment and neutralization is not unique to Australia. The idea of free sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean greatly affects the commerce of nations throughout the world. For this reason alone many non-littoral nations favor a zone of peace in the Ocean--to remove any potential for military confrontation or rivalries which might disrupt shipping or exert pressures on nations using the shipping lanes.

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<sup>115</sup>New York Times, 7 June 1973, p. 31.

<sup>116</sup>New York Times, 9 February 1974, p. 8.



### 3. Indonesia

This strategically located archipelago controls the major access routes to the eastern Indian Ocean. Moreover, it has one of the largest naval forces along the littoral. In the early 1960's Indonesia's President Sukarno requested and received Soviet help to develop his naval forces. During the same period he proclaimed the "archipelago concept," which would restrict the passage of warships through Indonesian waters and straits. "Concern about Indonesia's potential impact on the global strategic balance was intensified when Sukarno announced that Indonesia was a 'comrade-in-arms' of Communist China and part of the Djakarta-Phnom Penh-Hanoi-Pyongyang-Peking axis."<sup>117</sup>

Were it not for the 1965 downfall of Sukarno and with it a loss of Soviet support and a reversal of Indonesia's political orientation, the Indonesian barrier to the eastern Indian Ocean access might have become a reality. However, Indonesia's foreign policy now favors a stronger Western relationship. The Indonesian government tends to agree with most littoral nations on nonalignment, but it supports a much

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<sup>117</sup>Guy J. Pauker, "Indonesian Perspectives on the Indian Ocean," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 225.



different approach to great power naval forces in the Indian Ocean.

"The spirit of realism that now pervades Indonesian foreign policy has extended to a rejection of the idea of a 'neutralized' Indian Ocean. Although the policy is praised as ideal it is recognized as impractical. The government in Djakarta has realized that, although Indonesia has great interests in the Ocean, it is at the moment too weak to exercise an effective defense of them. The Ceylonese idea of excluding the great powers from the Ocean is seen as impossible because these powers are already present there and are unlikely to give up the position that they now maintain. From Djakarta's point of view the real danger lies in one great power achieving exclusive hegemony in the Ocean and being able to improve unilaterally its own will."<sup>118</sup>

Whereas the majority of the littoral desire a zone of peace free from great power presence, Indonesia, perhaps more realistically, suggests a balance of great powers to offset each other. While this approach might maintain peace in the Indian Ocean, it will contribute to escalating tensions and military hardware build-ups, only to threaten the concepts of a "zone of peace."

#### 4. South Africa

South Africa, like most of the developing littoral states, is heavily dependent upon an ocean-oriented trade organization. The security provided by British naval forces in the area prior to their reduction beginning after World War Two greatly protected South Africa's sea-based lanes of communication. This

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<sup>118</sup>Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, eds., The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 200.





sense of security was sharply jolted, not only in South Africa, but also throughout the littoral, by the 1968 Soviet deployment into the area.

South Africa commands a major point of entry into the Indian Ocean. This route south of the Cape of Good Hope becomes even more important with the closure of the Suez Canal. The excellent port facilities in South Africa are strategically located along the Atlantic-Indian Ocean trade route, and anyone desiring to control the Indian Ocean would place this country on a high priority. The former British naval base at Simonstown is the "only permanent modern naval base backed by a modern industrial community and a stable government in the vast area stretching from Australia to South America."<sup>119</sup> This naval base can be available to the West if required. While South Africa does not condone the Soviet naval operations in the Indian Ocean, neither does it believe that a policy of non-alignment is appropriate. The South African relations with Western nations support a balance of force policy in place of a zone of peace for the Indian Ocean.

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<sup>119</sup>P. Smit, "South Africa and the Indian Ocean: The South African Viewpoint," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R. M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 285.



## 5. Summary of Littoral Attitudes

The political attitudes of the more prominent littoral naval powers favor, at least in the general sense, a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean. Some nations favor a balance of the existing great power naval forces, while others support a complete neutrality within the Indian Ocean.

Those littoral nations not addressed heretofore can be categorized into three groups. Some of the newly developing littoral states have established some form of relations with external powers. These nations have provided in the past port facilities for foreign naval units. Whereas their own political strength is limited relative to the stronger littoral states, they can offer necessary shore-based support facilities for logistical and maintenance requirements. These nations do not follow the rest of the littoral in pursuing a zone of peace or neutrality in the Indian Ocean.

A second group of littoral nations foresee the apparent security inherent in a "neutral" Indian Ocean. "It is to be noted that some nonaligned states in the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean are proposing that the maintenance of security in the Ocean should be left primarily to the efforts of the regional coastal states."<sup>120</sup> This group of states is in basic

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<sup>120</sup>Shinsaku Hogen, "The Present State of the Indian Ocean," The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic and Military Importance, ed. by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 389.



agreement with India in the nonalignment and neutralization concepts of their foreign policy.

The third group of area states are concerned about the presence of great power navies in the Indian Ocean, but also recognize their already established presence. This group of states prefers to advocate a balance of power approach, with the belief that the opposing forces can be equalized so that no foreign naval force can claim dominance in the area. This approach is realistically oriented, for the Soviet Union and the United States both have established deployed forces in the area, and both firmly adhere to the principle of international freedom of the seas. However, this approach also encourages the buildup of tensions and naval hardware, as one side attempts to maintain equality with the other. If it can be said that this littoral group is realistically reacting to the problem, it can also be argued that this is a short term solution to a complex situation.

The stronger littoral nations agree on the desirability of a zone of peace within the Indian Ocean. Those littoral nations with lesser political and military influence generally support this neutrality concept. There exist a few littoral nations who do not share the idea of a zone of peace, and who overtly cooperate with any of the great powers of convenience. Owing to the dominance of India in the littoral, the prevailing





littoral attitude supports nonalignment and a zone of peace within the Indian Ocean.

### C. INDIA AND LEADERSHIP OF THE LITTORAL

Of those nations which border the Indian Ocean, India possesses the greatest potential for achieving great power status. The Indian government's commitment to a policy of nonalignment and the neutrality of the Indian Ocean has strongly persisted since the Indian independence. By combining these two concepts, one might speculate that India would become the controlling agent within the Indian Ocean. "Since India and Pakistan are among the largest and most powerful of the coastal states in the Indian Ocean and are with sizable naval forces, these two countries, perhaps together with Ceylon, will have to play important roles in shaping the future destiny of the Indian Ocean."<sup>121</sup>

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has repeatedly objected to great power naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Although India has received considerable military, economic, and technological assistance from the Soviet Union in recent years, by no means does India acquiesce to a change in its policy of nonalignment and neutralization. It may be unrealistic to believe that India can now force foreign naval units out of

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 383.





the Indian Ocean, and any such act would violate current international freedom of the seas agreements. However, India has been in the vanguard of the zone of peace movement in the Indian Ocean, and will continue to lead the littoral with ever-increasing strength.

It is merely speculative to predict that India will achieve a great power status. The immense population base, and the large land mass, together with the growing technological base, substantiate India's great power potential. The international exhibition of India's ability to utilize fissionable material strongly suggests India's self-perceived position in the international political realm.

Within the littoral nations, no political orientation exists which binds all the nations together in any common position on nonalignment or zone of peace. India can unilaterally claim a position of leadership of the littoral, but no allegiance will be necessarily credited to India's proclaimed dominance. In order for India to politically dominate the Indian Ocean littoral, it must firmly establish itself as either the dominant power in the area, or as the champion of the combined attitudes of the littoral.



#### D. SUMMARY

The political environment within the Indian Ocean is fairly well united in the concept of a zone of peace. The underlying reasons for this policy differ among littoral nations; and the degree to which these area nations pursue this foreign policy varies as well. Nonetheless, the general political attitude of the littoral is based on a desire to keep great power naval forces from maintaining a force presence in the Indian Ocean.

The alternative approach, adopted by some littoral nations, recognizes the already established presence of the great power naval units in the Indian Ocean, and supports a balance of great power naval forces to maintain an equilibrium in the area.

India is the strongest and most visible proponent of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean. This, coupled with India's potential for great power status, awards India a strong leadership position among the Indian Ocean littoral. It cannot be assumed that India can force its ideas of nonalignment and zone of peace on all littoral states, but it can project these ideas to the international political environment with substantial force and commitment, irregardless of dissenting littoral nations. Consequently, any foreign policy that requires a foreign naval presence in the Indian Ocean will not be favorably received by the majority of, nor the strongest, Indian Ocean littoral nations.



## VI. EVALUATION OF HYPOTHESIS

This thesis has analyzed a foreign policy approach to meet national interests in the Indian Ocean. Specific national interests for the United States were assumed, in order to examine the appropriateness and applicability of one specific foreign policy to meet those interests. The assumed national interests took into account the Soviet naval forces, and concluded that the Soviet fleet maintained in the Indian Ocean does not threaten United States security interests at this time. Moreover, the assumed interests reflect the basic ideals of the Nixon Doctrine, wherein increased participation of littoral nations for their collective defense, augmented by U.S. forces only when necessary, would replace permanently stationed U.S. forces in the area, other than the Middle East Force.

A foreign policy oriented toward these national interests was presented as a potential alternative to present and future U.S. policy in the Indian Ocean. A canal across Thailand's Isthmus of Kra, through which the United States naval forces would have free and immediate access, could possibly provide the United States with a marginally better capability than existing passages through the Barrier to respond to situations in the Indian Ocean which threaten United States security





objectives. Furthermore, the Kra Canal could provide a limited improvement in logistic support over the currently used alternative routes into the Ocean.

## A. ASSESSMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS

### 1. Foreign Policy in Support of National Interests

The foreign policy as proposed possesses a basic similarity with the current foreign policy in the Indian Ocean; the difference being the access route through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier. The assumed national interests rely on a low-key United States presence in the Ocean, with the capability to respond to the area when necessary. The Kra Canal would reduce transit time to the Ocean from the South China Sea by approximately thirty-five hours, based on a twenty knot speed of advance.

One distinct advantage that the Kra Canal would offer to transiting naval units into the Indian Ocean is its immunity to the political nature of the Malacca Straits, and the possibility of restrictions on warships transiting the Straits. The time required to by-pass the Indonesian Archipelago to the east in response to an Indian Ocean situation would be detrimental to U.S. national interests.



## 2. Current and Proposed U.S. Indian Ocean Policy

Present United States Naval policy in the Indian Ocean emphasizes a "low-key" approach. A token U.S. Naval force, consisting of three ships, is permanently stationed in Bahrain, and primarily serves to show the American flag across the Ocean. This U.S. force is augmented by occasional deployments of units from the Seventh Fleet, including aircraft carrier task forces. Future United States naval policy includes a proposal to construct a logistical support base on the island of Diego Garcia, located near the center of the Ocean. This base could be used to support the periodically deployed units from the Seventh Fleet, as well as serve as an operating base for a permanently deployed task force.

The proposed foreign policy would maintain the present level of U.S. naval activity in the Indian Ocean. It would not mean the establishment of an operating base within the Indian Ocean, and it would encourage the low-key presence of U.S. naval activity in the Ocean.

## 3. Indian Ocean Political Environment

Maintenance of a zone of peace within the Indian Ocean together with an adherence to nonalignment are dominant attitudes among the Indian Ocean littoral. The littoral negatively responds to the presence of foreign great power warships in the Ocean, and denounces any attempt to establish permanent operating facilities along the littoral.



The proposed foreign policy, although not abstaining from U.S. Naval activity in the Indian Ocean, does not represent a significant U.S. Naval presence. The low visibility of naval activity violates the absolute concept of an Indian Ocean zone of peace. However, it represents the least offensive policy to the littoral, while at the same time supporting U.S. security objectives in the Ocean.

The Isthmus of Kra itself is part of the Indian Ocean littoral. A canal similar to that of the Panama Canal, with a foreign power possessing sovereignty of the Canal Zone, would be similar to having a foreign base along the littoral. The proposed policy encompasses United States support for the Canal's construction, with unconditional access rights, rather than a U.S. owned and operated canal.

#### 4. Foreign Policy Feasibility

The proposed foreign policy presupposes that a canal can be constructed across the Isthmus of Kra. The existence of the Suez and Panama Canals are indisputable evidence that such a canal using conventional construction techniques can be accomplished. The large expense involved, together with the lengthy construction time, place severe constraints on the canal's potential. Canal construction using nuclear techniques is feasible, and would greatly reduce the construction time, although the expense would be equally large.





It is questionable whether the economic benefits that would accrue from a canal across the Kra Isthmus would sustain the canal effort. As the merchant vessels increase in size and cargo-carrying capacity, increased transit distances around the Indonesia Archipelago are compensated by the increased capacities. Military applicability of the canal, even if all other passages through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier are closed to military use, is not sufficient to warrant canal construction.

There exists today the technological capability to construct a canal across the Isthmus of Kra. At the present time, and in the foreseeable future, it seems unrealistic to consider any condition which would stimulate efforts to construct the canal. However, there may occur at some future time considerations that would substantiate the construction of a Kra Canal.

An additional consideration is the acceptability of a canal to Thailand. Owing to the limited canal construction capability possessed by Thailand, there would likely be foreign technical and economic support. Thailand's political orientation appears to be changing away from the Western camp. That Thailand has refused to allow U.S. airborne reconnaissance of the Indian Ocean from Thai airbases suggests that Thailand would not support U.S. Naval activity in the Indian Ocean through the Kra Canal. Thailand's respect for China's security





interests in Southeast Asia, coupled with the absence of a threat from naval activity within the Indian Ocean, indicate a lack of Thai cooperation with any major power in the construction of the canal.

#### 5. Impact of the Foreign Policy

The proposed foreign policy seems to support the assumed national interests in the Indian Ocean. However, there are minimal differences between this proposed policy, and the current policy using the Straits of Malacca to gain entry into the Indian Ocean. The reduced transit distance is not significant in view of the speed capability of combatant and logistic units. The low-key U.S. Naval presence in the Ocean can be maintained using the Straits as well as the Kra Canal. A U.S. supported Kra Canal, motivated by military considerations, is impractical and unnecessary if transit through the Straits by U.S. warships can be maintained.

#### B. CONCLUSION

The hypothesis of this paper is: The United States should support the construction of the proposed Kra Canal so that Seventh Fleet naval units could rapidly respond to political-military activities within the Indian Ocean, in support of American national interests, as an alternative to stationing a major task force, or acquiring a major operating base within the area.



An analysis of this hypothesis with the information provided in this paper, indicates that American national interests, as herein defined, can be supported by the absence of a permanent operating force or operating base other than the Middle East Force, provided naval units from outside the area are readily available to respond when necessary in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, this policy is most consistent with the political attitudes of the Indian Ocean littoral.

It is concluded, however, that this hypothesis should be rejected, in that the Kra Canal would not provide the United States with an access route through the Indonesia-Malay Barrier significantly better than the passages now in existence.

United States naval forces assigned to the Seventh Fleet have been used to conduct periodic operations in the Indian Ocean, either to acquire operating experience, or in response to specific events in the area. These naval units transiting into the Ocean have utilized the Straits of Malacca. By way of a canal through the Isthmus of Kra, Seventh Fleet units could save approximately 700 miles between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The effect of the Kra Canal on Seventh Fleet response, with the alternative to the canal being the Malacca Straits, is a reduction in response time of some thirty-five hours. On a transit between the Philippine Islands and the mid-Indian Ocean,



a distance of approximately 2,800 miles through the Straits, the Kra Canal route would offer a twenty percent reduction in time and distance. Assuming a speed of advance of twenty knots, transit time between the Philippines and mid-Indian Ocean is almost six days. In the event that a crisis situation occurs in the Indian Ocean, the lengthy transit time would preclude the immediacy of a naval response. Use of the Kra Canal, while reducing transit time by thirty-five hours, would not appreciably improve response time in the face of a crisis situation. In this scenario the Kra Canal, while offering some advantages in reduced transit time, would not be of sufficient scope to warrant its construction.

Another scenario, one which is less likely to occur, would have the Indonesia-Malay Barrier politically closed to foreign warships by Indonesian and Malaysian claims to territorial waters of the Malacca Straits. This scenario substantially increases the relevancy of the Kra Canal to military operations within the Indian Ocean. It is in this context that the Kra Canal would be a viable policy alternative to be seriously considered. However, the United States has strongly supported its position on the international or territorial status of the Straits, rejecting the Indonesian-Malaysian claims. One aspect of U.S. national interests in this area is the maintenance of free and open surface and air lines of communication throughout





the area of the Indian Ocean. Any attempt by Indonesia or Malaysia to prohibit the passage of warships through the Straits would provoke a strong and overwhelming U.S. response.

Beyond the insignificant impact that the canal would have on U.S. naval response to the Indian Ocean, exists the consideration of Thailand-United States relations. Thailand has allowed the United States to conduct air operations for the protection of national governments in Indochina. Thailand realizes the potential threat to its security from insurgent movements from within Indochina. Thailand does not recognize a threat to its security from within the Indian Ocean, and has refused to allow U.S. reconnaissance patrols of the Indian Ocean from Thai bases. This latter policy is partially motivated by Thailand's desire to refrain from making provocative gestures to China. A canal which would grant a military advantage to a great power navy for operations in the Indian Ocean would be unacceptable to China. It is unlikely that Thailand would take such a move.

From the above considerations, therefore, it can be concluded that a canal across the Isthmus of Kra would not significantly improve United States naval response and logistic support in the pursuit of U.S. national interests in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, the political climate in Thailand is not accommodating to foreign interest or control in any Kra Canal project. The present level of U.S. naval activity within the Indian Ocean,



including the Middle East Force and occasional visits by Seventh Fleet units, augmented when necessary by a carrier task force through the Straits of Malacca, is considered sufficient to meet the U.S. national interests as defined in this thesis.



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